

NORTH KOREAN SPECIAL FORCES

JOSEPH S. BERMUDEZ Jr



Although the Korean War officially ended in 1953, North Korea has since then waged an undeclared low-intensity war of infiltration and intimidation against its southern neighbour. Responsible for this campaign is one of the world's largest and best trained bodies of special forces.

Likened by many observers to the Soviet Union's Spetsnaz undercover troops, the North Korean Special Purpose Forces have carried out at least one assassination attempt outside Korea – the attack directed at Southern President Chun in Rangoon in 1983 – and are present as 'advisers' in Afghanistan and in trouble spots in Central America and Africa. They have also conducted SIGINT operations against the USA from vessels in the Gulf of California. In time of full-scale war they would spearhead any Northern drive into the South, and would seek to impede the flow of outside assistance by sabotaging allied, especially American, facilities in Japan, the Philippines and Okinawa.

North Korean Special Forces, drawing primarily on recently declassified intelligence material, details for the first time in the West the operational history, tactics, equipment, organisation and order of battle of the units that make up this formidable 117,000-strong formation.

The Special Purpose Forces' assault on the national nerve and, occasionally, the citizens and leaders of South Korea is conducted by air, sea and land. These elite soldiers are known to be training in the use of parachutes, hang-gliders, ultralights, hot-air balloons and sailplanes as means of evading the air defence radars keeping watch over the Demilitarised Zone.

More worrying still for the South is the acquisition by the Special Purpose Forces of US-built McDonnell Douglas Defender helicopters of the type operated by the Republic of Korea Air Force. Now regularly employed for cross-border incursions, these aircraft pose a threat that is particularly difficult to counter.

There can be no more spectacular demonstration of the North's determination to reunite the two Koreas by force than the tunnels discovered running beneath the DMZ. One is so large that that it would have permitted Northern troops to flood into the Republic at a rate of thousands an hour, with units of the Special Forces at their head.

Continued on Back Flap

If such a versatile force can be said to have a speciality, it must be amphibious operations. Hooking round the heavily guarded DMZ, Northern infiltrators are landed on the beaches of the Republic by coastal and midget submarine, powered inflatables, rowing boats and kayaks, modified fishing boats, explosive boats and semi-submersible swimmer delivery vehicles. Many of these craft, and the equipment carried aboard them, have been captured in action and are illustrated in this book.

The chronic tension which exists between the two opposing regimes on the Korean peninsula continues to create a high risk of open conflict and subsequent superpower involvement. If a new Korean war ever broke out, the tough, skilful and fanatically determined Special Purpose Forces would be in the forefront, disrupting the Southern rear areas, capturing key personnel for their intelligence value, and striving to 'decapitate' the leadership of the South with a systematic campaign of assassination. *North Korean Special Forces* describes in the fullest possible detail a formation which ranks alongside the US Special Forces, Soviet Spetsnaz and British SAS in its ability to have an influence on the battle that is out of all proportion to its numbers.

Joseph S. Bermudez Jr is a defence analyst whose articles and papers are used as the basis of US Army Opposing Forces assessments. He has also contributed material on North Korea and the Middle East to *Jane's Defence Weekly*, *Marine Corps Gazette*, *Combat Weapons*, *Armor* and *Defence Asia-Pacific*.

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Joseph S. Bermudez Jr

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Introduction

North Korean Special Forces is a first attempt to compile and summarise, in reference book format, what little open-source information is available concerning one of the world's largest and most formidable special operations forces—the Korean People's Army Special Purpose Forces. It is meant to be neither an all-inclusive study of the subject nor a comprehensive study of the Korean People's Army itself. These will have to wait for a future opportunity.

The collecting and processing of information for this book has been a frustrating but educational experience. Over the years I have collected numerous pieces of information, seemingly unrelated and often incomplete themselves, and placed them in a database (actually a large folder at first). Every few months I would go back to this database and attempt to bring some semblance of order to it, often with little success. Yet patterns did develop and some questions were answered. The big breakthrough came when I obtained, under the Freedom of Information Act, several declassified intelligence documents. These documents, although unrelated, provided key pieces of information and the years of research quickly fell into place. The result is this book.

Accuracy in any work dealing with the Korean People's Army, and especially its elite Special Purpose Forces, is a relative matter. A certain amount of the information in this volume will inevitably be incorrect. Other material may be misinformation, disseminated by interested parties to serve their own purposes. The qualifications "probably", "estimated", "are believed to" and "apparently" must appear frequently in any work of this type. In retrospect, the paucity of reliable information has probably resulted in my having overstated the capabilities of Special Purpose Forces for operations within the Korean Peninsula and underestimated their global capabilities (especially in the areas of foreign military assistance and terrorism). Several conventions have been used to increase the readability of the book. I have endeavoured to use the abbreviation "DPRK" to represent the Democratic People's Republic of Korea instead of the more popular "North Korea". The term "Korean People's Army", and its abbreviation KPA, are used to represent the *Choson Inmingin* and the more common "North Korean People's Army" (NKPA). The term "Fatherland Liberation War" is used by the KPA, and in this book, instead of the more popular "Korean conflict" or "Korean War". The term "enemy" normally refers to an enemy of the KPA, typically the Republic of Korea, the United States and their respective armies. This does not mean that these are the KPA's only potential opponents; they are not, as witness, the KPA's increasingly large commitments to combat operations in the Third World. Limitations of space have dictated the exclusion of much information about the KPA in general (i.e. history, tactics and equipment) and the Special Purpose Forces (i.e. global operations).

Very few books, if any, represent the unaided efforts of one person, and this volume is most certainly no exception. Had it not been for the contributions and support of many people and organisations, some of whom must remain anonymous, this book would have been a mere shadow of its present self. I would like

to extend my sincere thanks to: Desmond Ball; Anna and Joseph S. Bermudez Sr (my parents, who instilled in me a passion for learning); W. Seth Carus (for his encouragement and assistance); James R. Dennis; Brendan Gallagher (who allowed me the opportunity to write this book and made the process enjoyable); Steven Glick; Howard J. Gunzenhaser (my father-in-law); Bradley Hahn (for his most gracious loan of the majority of the photographs which appear in this work); David Isby; Keith Jacobs; Edward Kranick Jr; William Lewis of the National Archives and Record Center; James W. Loop; Nick Molnar; Omega Group Ltd, which allowed me to use my article "North Korea's Combined Arms Brigades," published in *Combat Weapons*, as the basis of the chapter on the same subject; Shelby Stanton; Captain Raymond Yennello; the FOIA staffs at the DIA, US Army Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence and the US Army ITAC (especially their North Korean analysts, who had to review all my FOIA requests); Steven J. Zaloga (who although he might not remember it, many years ago convinced me to start publishing the numerous works that I had written); and lastly to my family—Diane, Shammah, Rebecca and Micah. Thank you one and all.

For those who have an interest in such things, this book was written entirely on an Apple Macintosh Plus computer using Microsoft Word. The diagrams and maps were also produced on the Macintosh Plus, using Innovative Data Design's Macdraft and were printed with a LaserWriter Plus (courtesy of Nickolas Molnar and the folks at the Byte Shop of Merrick).

If readers have any information, source material, corrections, photographs, comments or anything else that might pertain to a revised edition, I can be contacted at Jane's Publishing Company Ltd, 238 City Road, London EC1Y 2PU, United Kingdom.

Joseph S. Bermudez Jr
YPY
New York
March 1988

**To my wife Diane,
with whom "I'm madly,
passionately,
hopelessly in love"**

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Abbreviations

AAA	anti-aircraft artillery	KPA	Korean People's Army
AAMG	anti-aircraft machine gun	KPAF	Korean People's Air Force
AbnLIB	airborne light infantry brigade	KPN	Korean People's Navy
AbnLIBn	airborne light infantry battalion	KVA	Korean Volunteer Army
ADM	atomic demolition munitions	KWP	Korean Workers' Party
AFB	Air Force Base	LCM	landing craft, mechanised
AFV	armoured fighting vehicle	LCPF	landing craft, patrol, fast
ALIB	amphibious light infantry brigade	LCU	landing craft, utility
ALIBn	amphibious light infantry battalion	LIB	light infantry brigade
ALIU	amphibious light infantry unit	LIBn	light infantry battalion
ANGLICO	air, naval, gun liaison company	LMG	light machine gun
AO	area of operations	LOC	lines of communication
APC	armoured personnel carrier	LSM	landing ship, mechanised
ARV	armoured recovery vehicle	MDL	Military Demarcation Line
ATGM	anti-tank guided missile	MND	Ministry of National Defence
ATIS	Allied Translator and Interpreter Section	MPAF	Ministry of the People's Armed Forces
AVBL	armoured vehicle, bridge-laying	MRL	multiple rocket launcher
C³I	Command, control, communications and intelligence	NBC	nuclear, biological and chemical
CBR	chemical, biological and radiological	NCO	non-commissioned officer
CCF	Chinese Communist Forces	OOB	order of battle
COMINT	communications intelligence	OPFOR	US Army Opposition Forces
COMSEC	communications security	POL	petroleum, oil and lubricants
CPR	cardio-pulmonary resuscitation	PRC	People's Republic of China (i.e. Communist China)
CVA	Chinese Volunteer Army	RcLR	recoilless rifle
DAPam	Department of the Army pamphlet	ROK	Republic of Korea (i.e. South Korea)
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency	ROKA	Republic of Korea Army
DMZ	demilitarised zone	ROKAF	Republic of Korea Air Force
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (i.e. North Korea)	ROKN	Republic of Korea Navy
ELINT	electronic intelligence	RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
EUSA	Eighth US Army	SAM	surface-to-air missile
EUSAK	Eighth US Army, Korea	SCUBA	self-contained breathing apparatus
FC	field circular	SEAL	Sea, Air and Land. The US Navy's special operations force.
FEBA	forward edge of the battle area	SIGINT	signals intelligence
FEC	Far East Command (US)	SOP	standard operating procedure
FM	field manual	SP	self-propelled
FTX	field training exercise	SPF	Special Purpose Forces
G2	intelligence section	SS	attack submarine
GHQ	General Headquarters (KPA equivalent is General Staff Department)	SSc	attack submarine, coastal
GRU	Chief Intelligence Directorate, General Staff (Soviet)	SSm	attack submarine, mini-
GPO	Government Printing Office	T/O&E	tables of organisation & establishment
HAHO	high-altitude, high-opening	TC	training circular
HALO	high-altitude, low-opening	UN	United Nations
HQ	headquarters	UNC	United Nations Command
KGB	Committee for State Security (Soviet)	US	United States
		USAF	United States Air Force
		USMC	United States Marine Corps
		UW	unconventional warfare
		U/I	unidentified

Chapter One

Overview

*"It is our supreme task of struggle for the KPA to expel American aggressive forces from the southern half, to liberate our compatriots, and to achieve the reunification of Korea."*¹

General

For US military personnel there are few regions in the world where the tension is higher, or the threat of war greater, than in the Republic of Korea (ROK). One of the most significant yet least understood aspects of this threat is the Korean People's Army (KPA) Special Purpose Forces (SPF). This force of 121,500 troops represents one of the world's largest bodies of elitely trained soldiers, and constitutes approximately 15% of the KPA's total peacetime strength.² It is the equivalent of approximately 10 regular KPA infantry divisions and contributes significantly to the KPA's overall capability.

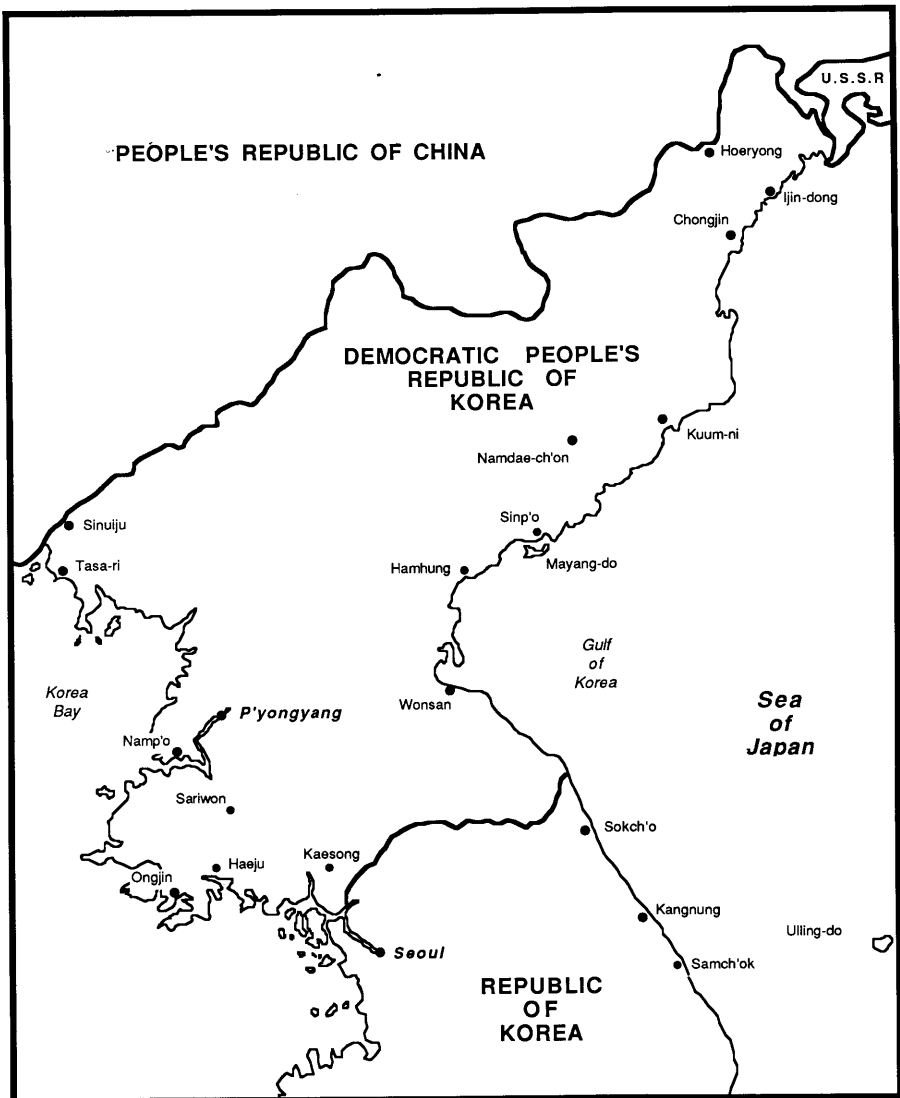
The term "Special Purpose Forces" was coined by the United States during the early 1980s to provide a single name for that group of KPA combat-related units which are elitely trained and uniquely structured. These units had been variously identified using names such as ranger/commando, light infantry, airborne, "sniper", reconnaissance, amphibious assault, and others. Differences between the various types of unit are by design specific to their primary mission, training, and equipment. All SPF units possess ranger/commando and special forces type, as well as unconventional warfare and special operations type, capabilities.³ KPA doctrine calls for the integration of these units and operations into all phases of combat operations.

Although influenced by both Soviet and Chinese Second World War era partisans/guerillas and present day elite forces, the KPA Special Purpose Force should be examined as a unique entity and not as an extension or "mirror image" of the former. All SPF personnel are highly motivated, politically well indoctrinated and well trained. The skills, such as abseiling, mountain climbing, swimming, martial arts, airborne, demolition, and rigorous physical fitness, and training, designed to produce individual initiative, creativity, flexibility and aggressiveness, that the members of these units receive are similar to those associated with elite units throughout the world. SPF units are expected to seek the initiative continuously, to turn all unforeseen events to their advantage, and above all to achieve their objectives regardless of cost.

Missions and capabilities

The Special Purpose Forces have the capability, training and equipment to execute the following strategic/operational/tactical-level missions:

- Seizure or destruction of ROK/US nuclear, chemical, and command, control, communication and intelligence (C³I) assets.



- Seizure or destruction of major military targets (airfields, naval bases, port facilities, POL storage facilities, missile sites, etc.) within rear areas.
- Interdiction, seizure and control of ROK/US lines of communications (LOC). Interdiction of reinforcements and supplies for forces deployed along the demilitarised zone (DMZ), and in advance of, or in support of, regular ground force operations.
- Assaults against, and control of, major fortified defensive positions, lines or zones.
- Reconnaissance and intelligence operations.
- Unconventional warfare and special operations (including "direct action" and diversionary operations).

In addition to the missions stated above SPF units have the capability, training and equipment to conduct theatre/global level missions. The objectives for these would include:

- The capture, or destruction, of ROK/US chemical, nuclear warfare, C³I and missile assets.
- The assassination of the ROK political leadership.
- The assassination or abduction of senior ROK/US military commanders.
- Raids against US 5th Air Force airfields in Japan (Misawa and Yokota AFB) and on the island of Okinawa (Kadena AFB) and conceivably against military installations in the Philippines and Hawaii.
- Intelligence and special operations (including "direct action") beyond the Korean Peninsula.
- Internal security operations for the protection of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Government.
- Military training (i.e. functioning as "advisers") to friendly governments and organisations (i.e. Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, PLO, Red Brigades, etc.).

The missions and capabilities of the Special Purpose Forces are roughly comparable with similar US and Soviet organisations:

KPA	US	Soviet
Light infantry	Rangers	Raydoviki
Airborne light infantry	Airborne/Rangers	Airborne/ raydoviki
Reconnaissance	Special Forces	Vysotniki/GRU troops
Amphibious light infantry	Marines/SEALs	Naval Infantry/ Naval commandos

A dramatic example of the capabilities of the Special Purpose Forces to conduct such missions was the 9 October 1983 bombing in Rangoon; an attempt to assassinate ROK President Chun Doo Hwan. This operation was carried out by three members of a reconnaissance brigade, under the direction of the Reconnaissance Bureau.⁴ The implications of this act, and the potential for future such acts, are cause for concern throughout the international community. More than a hundred DPRK embassies/diplomatic missions, trading corporations, trade and aid missions, and military assistance and advisory teams located throughout the world provide safe havens for these operations and pose a worldwide threat of DPRK support for terrorist activity.⁵

Command and control

The premier of the DPRK, Kim Il-sung, is concurrently the Commander-in-Chief, of the armed forces and Chairman of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP). The KPA is institutionally subordinate to the Central People's Committee and its National Defence Commission. Effective control, however, resides with the top KWP leadership through the Military Commission of the KWP Central Committee.⁶ General policy direction and strategic planning are determined at this level under Kim Il-sung's guidance and routed through the Ministry of The People's Armed Forces (MPAF) to the General Staff Department. Operational

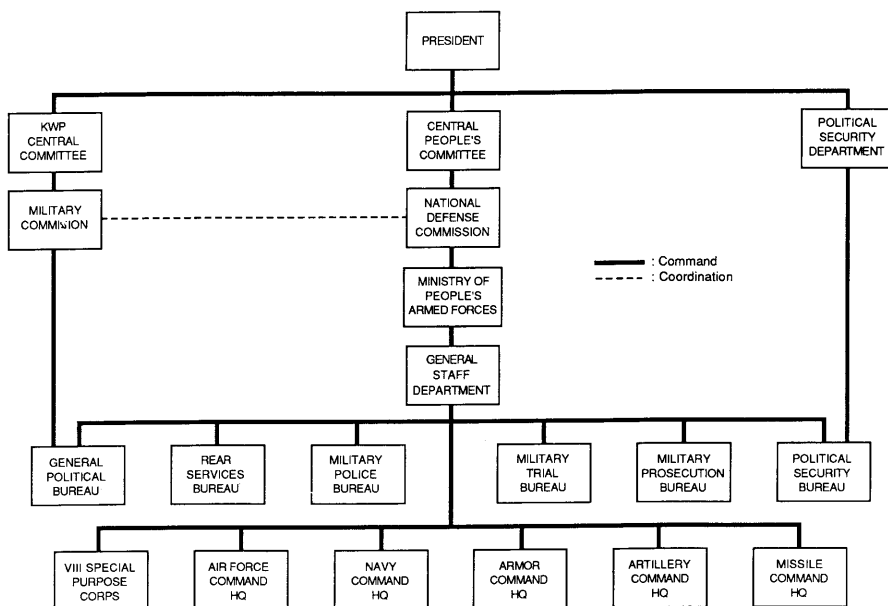
command flows from the General Staff Department, through its various bureaux and command HQs, to the operational units.⁷

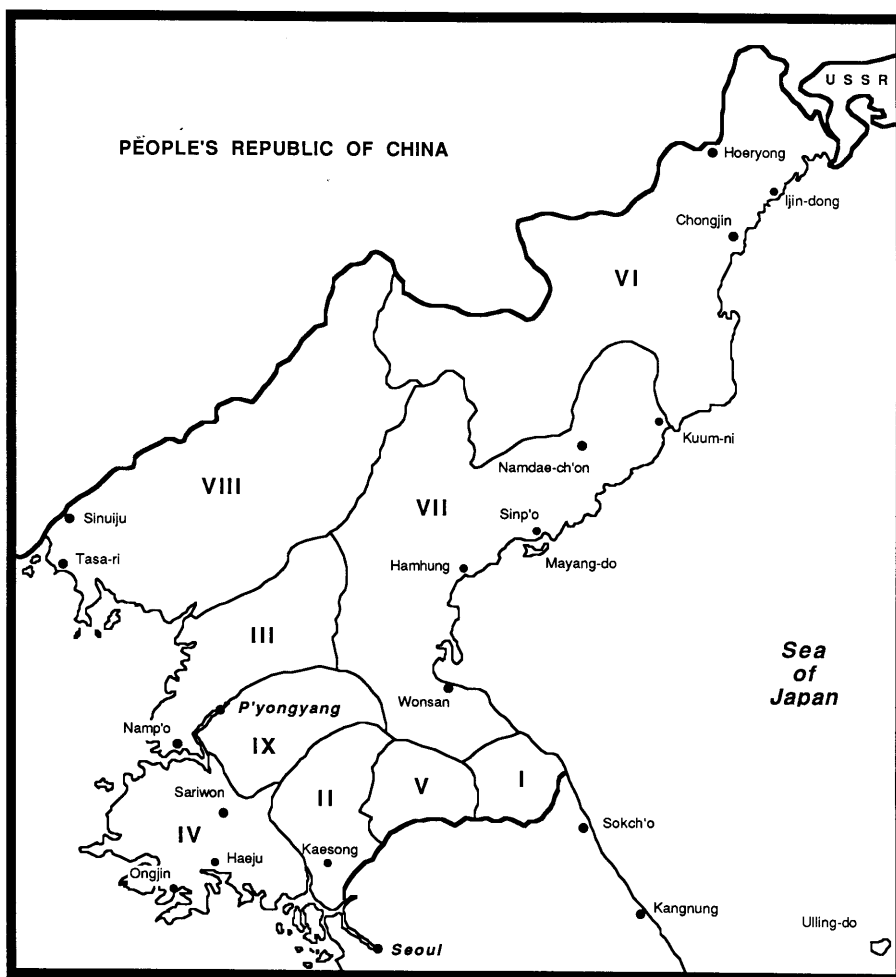
Political control of the armed forces commences with the KWP, through its Military Commission, to the MPAF, and to the Chief of the General Staff where it is administratively vested in the General Political Bureau. This bureau, although technically subordinate to the MPAF through the General Staff Department, is under the direct control of the KWP's Military Commission which disseminates all orders and directives of the KWP Central Committee governing political activities in the Armed Forces.

The major bureaux subordinate to the General Staff Department include: General Political, Rear Services, Military Police, Military Trial, Military Prosecution, and Political Security. The Commands include the: Army, Navy, Air Force, Artillery, Armour, Missile, and VIII Special Purpose Corps.⁸

VIII Special Purpose Corps provides all special purpose units with administrative and technical support, and exercises "peacetime" operational control over all airborne light infantry brigades, amphibious light infantry brigades, and those reconnaissance and light infantry brigades which are not located within the "forward" corps areas.⁹ During peacetime those reconnaissance and light infantry brigades located within the "forward" corps areas are believed to be subordinate to, and under the operational control of, the reconnaissance section (G-2) of the respective corps headquarters.¹⁰ During wartime, control of these units reverts to VIII Special Purpose Corps. The divisional light infantry battalions, although they also receive administrative and technical support from VIII Special Purpose Corps, are directly subordinate to the reconnaissance section of their respective division headquarters.

Korean People's Army command and control.





Korean People's Army corps.

Elements of any SPF unit may be temporarily detached and subordinated to another headquarters for special missions. In such cases the SPF unit is under the operational control of the reconnaissance section of that headquarters. It may still receive administrative and technical support from VIII Special Purpose Corps. The combined-arms brigades are directly subordinate to the General Staff Department although they may also be temporarily attached to corps or division headquarters for special missions.

Additional administrative and technical support for all special purpose units is provided in varying degrees by the National Intelligence Committee, Cabinet Intelligence Committee, KWP-Liaison Department, General Staff Department's Reconnaissance Bureau, General Political Bureau, and the Political Security Department.

Organisation and strength

The SPF is presently organised into 24 light infantry type brigades (light infantry/airborne/amphibious/reconnaissance), five combined-arms brigades, and approximately 35 divisional-level light infantry battalions.¹¹ These units are deployed throughout the DPRK and are organised into four general groupings:

- Those SPF brigades that are directly subordinate to VIII Special Purpose Corps, none of which is located within the "forward" corps areas.
- Those SPF brigades subordinate to I, II and V "forward" Corps.
- The divisional-level light infantry battalions, organic to each of the KPA's 35 infantry/mechanised infantry divisions.
- The combined-arms brigades directly subordinate to the General Staff Department and deployed within VII Corps.

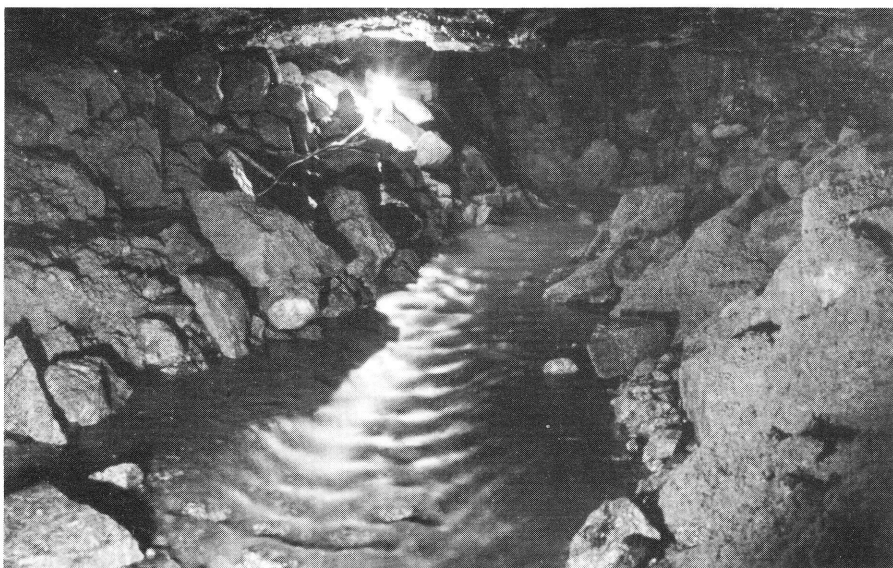
The size and composition of the Special Purpose Forces have undergone significant changes during the past 20 years, steadily increasing to today's total of 121,500. This figure is the subject of considerable confusion. The US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) estimates that these forces have grown from 15,000 in 1970 to 41,000 in 1978 and that they currently number approximately 81,000 (11% of the total KPA peacetime strength).¹² The ROK estimates that the SPF currently numbers approximately 100,000, or 12% of the total KPA peacetime strength. This study estimates that these forces currently number 121,500 troops, or approximately 15% of the total KPA's peacetime strength. The differences arise from the different ways employed in calculating such unique assets.

The DIA considers only the various light infantry and reconnaissance brigades. Divisional-level light infantry battalions are counted within the infantry divisions to which they are organic. Since 1984, the DIA has no longer considered the combined-arms brigades as subordinate to VIII Special Purpose Corps but rather directly subordinate to the General Staff Department. The ROK estimate includes all the various light infantry and reconnaissance brigades, and the divisional-level light infantry battalions; but not the combined-arms brigades. This study counts all the various light infantry and reconnaissance brigades, the divisional-level light infantry battalions and the combined arms brigades ($90,000 + 14,000 + 17,500 = 121,500$). The combined-arms brigades are included due to their unique mission, organisation and training.

Insertion methods

The majority of the missions assigned to the special purpose units initially require a clandestine means of insertion. Infiltration operations are conducted at night or under cover of limited visibility. The majority of all SPF units will probably be infiltrated on the ground through the DMZ or front lines. Those units not attempting to infiltrate on the ground may be inserted by tunnel, air or sea.

With the exception of the major land routes, the DMZ consists primarily of hilly or mountainous terrain with slopes that restrict movement. While this type of terrain is favourable for a conventional defence, it almost defies effective defence against irregular forces. The remote and inaccessible mountain regions provide cover and concealment, safe areas and numerous routes



DMZ infiltration tunnel, showing North Korean backfill 350m from the southern exit.

for escape and evasion. The lowlands consist of numerous fields that have reverted to tall grass, weeds, thickets and woods. Infiltration routes will typically include areas that are isolated, considered impassable (i.e. mountains, cliffs, etc.), boundaries between units, and areas where detection would be difficult. Infiltration will normally occur at night or during periods of limited visibility with the assistance of escorts (possibly from the DMZ Police Battalions or KWP—Liaison Department) who are thoroughly familiar with the area.

Besides the overland routes, SPF personnel could be infiltrated quickly and securely in large numbers past the DMZ by using tunnels. There are at present three known, yet neutralised, and 18 suspected active tunnels in various stages of completion along the DMZ.¹³ Surveillance of the suspected tunnel exits continues but their exact locations or the extent of construction is uncertain.

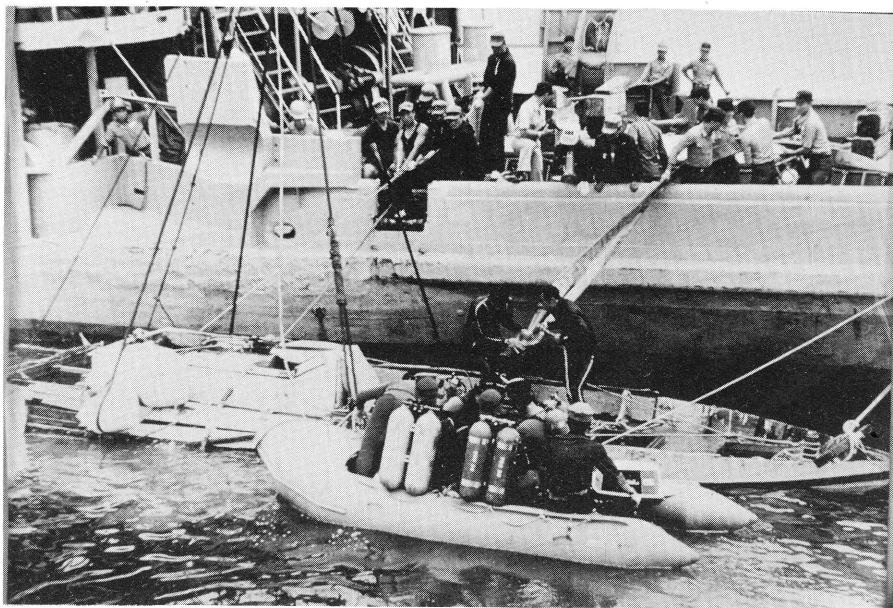
The second major means for insertion is by air. The majority of the Korean People's Air Force's (KPAF's) large fleet of approximately 250 An-2 Colt transport aircraft are probably earmarked to support operations by the SPF. The KPAF also possesses an ever increasing fleet of helicopters which could be used to insert small SPF teams. Most notable are the approximately 87 Hughes (now McDonnell Douglas) MD 500D/E helicopters which were smuggled into the country during 1983–85. These helicopters, which have been disguised as ROK 500MD Defenders, pose a very serious threat. There have already been a limited number of incursions of ROK airspace by these helicopters. Additionally, airborne light infantry personnel are trained in the use of sailplanes and ultra-lights.

The last means of insertion is by sea. The majority of the Korean People's Navy (KPN) amphibious warfare craft and submarines are dedicated to operations employing the amphibious light infantry brigades. However, small units of "standard" light infantry and reconnaissance units may be inserted by Nampo class assault landing craft and specially designed high-speed infiltration craft.



MD 500E helicopters like this one were smuggled into the DPRK and have been modified to resemble the MD 500MD Scout Defenders operated by the ROKAF. (McDonnell Douglas)

Wreckage of a DPRK agent infiltration boat captured following a high-speed chase off the north-east coast of the Republic on 21 July 1979. (Bradley-Hahn Collection)



Employment

During a renewed conflict on the Korean Peninsula, the KPA's Special Purpose Forces would be actively employed from the very onset.

Generally speaking the divisional light infantry battalions would conduct unconventional warfare operations within 15-30 km of the "forward edge of the battle area" (FEBA), and would be concerned with assisting the operations of their parent division. Operating in platoon and company-sized units, the battalion would concentrate on targets of immediate tactical importance, so as to isolate ROK/US units deployed along the FEBA from their tactical rear. The light infantry brigades would conduct unconventional warfare operations in the area 30-70 km from the FEBA (i.e. out to the edge of the corps area of operations), and would be concerned with assisting the operations of the corps. Operating in platoon and company-sized units, the brigade would concentrate on targets of tactical/operational importance, so as to isolate ROK/US units deployed along, and immediately behind, the FEBA from their operational/strategic rear. Operations beyond this would be the responsibility of the airborne light infantry, amphibious light infantry and reconnaissance brigades.

Unlike the light infantry brigades and battalions, which have unconventional warfare operation as a primary mission, the amphibious light infantry brigade's primary mission is to conduct offensive amphibious assaults and special operations along the ROK coast. They would engage in unconventional warfare operations as a secondary mission when and if the situation warranted.

The ability of the KPA to employ its three amphibious light infantry brigades is dependent upon the amphibious lift capabilities of the KPN. At present the KPN has approximately 102 amphibious warfare craft with a theoretical amphibious lift capacity of approximately 5,000 troops. Although this capacity almost matches the combined personnel strength for the three amphibious light infantry brigades, it is highly unlikely that the KPA could, or would, commit this entire force at once during a conflict. Even if the KPA were to employ all three brigades simultaneously, the KPN would be unable to sustain them solely with "over the beach" assets. In the event of renewed hostilities the probable employment of the amphibious light infantry brigades would include:

- One strategic and two battalion-sized operational landings on the west coast.
- Two battalion-sized operational landings on the east coast.
- Numerous tactical/special operations landings of company and platoon size, and special operations against naval bases, ports, coastal airfields, and other important targets located in coastal areas.
- Special operations against US facilities in Japan, Philippines, Okinawa, etc.

In addition to the above, if the DPRK leadership believed that the political situation warranted it, they could once again institute a policy of calculated escalation. Such escalation could witness strategic-level landings attempting to seize the ROK island of Ullung-do, or the islands of Yonp'yong-ni, Socheong-do, Daechong-do or Baegryeong-do. Such operations would place both the ROK and United States governments in an extremely difficult position. The ROK would have to either escalate, and risk full scale war by attempting to recapture the island(s), or lose credibility by doing nothing.

The missions assigned to the KPA's eight airborne light infantry brigades are

essentially the same as those of the light infantry brigades. However, they would be strategic/theatre level in nature and be conducted at a greater distance from the FEBA (i.e. beyond the corps area of operations). The airborne light infantry brigades are also tasked with the support of amphibious landings, the establishment of a new front within the ROK's strategic rear and the conduct of special operations in cooperation with reconnaissance and amphibious light infantry brigade personnel. These units also represent a significant part of the KPA's strategic reserves.

The ability of the KPA to employ the airborne light infantry brigades is dependent upon the airborne lift capabilities of the KPAF. The KPAF currently possesses approximately 419 transport aircraft and helicopters capable of conducting airborne operations. These have a theoretical capability to airlift a total of 5,000-6,000 troops. However, this figure is extremely optimistic and a more realistic estimate would be an airlift capacity of 2,000-3,000 troops. Even at this lower level it is doubtful that the KPAF could support them solely with air assets.

Due to the importance of the airborne light infantry brigades as a major portion of the strategic reserve forces and the KPAF's limited airlift capabilities, it is doubtful that the equivalent of more than 1-2 airborne light infantry brigades would be employed for offensive operations during the initial stages of a renewed conflict. The remaining airborne light infantry brigades may be employed when sufficient reserves become available to assume the rear area security mission (after approximately 60 days) and if the KPAF can maintain its airlift capabilities.

The primary missions for the airborne light infantry brigades employed during the initial phases of a new conflict would include:

- Operational and tactical/special operations against all ROKAF/USAF bases, strategic C'I centres, missile and radar sites.
- Support of strategic and operational-level amphibious landings.
- Combined operations with other SPF units.
- Tactical raids and ambushes against reinforcements, mobilising reserves, and reserve mobilisation and storage facilities.
- Deception operations throughout the ROK.

Among the primary objectives of the airborne light infantry brigade operations are ROK/US air bases. In this context it is important to note that all of the 109 active ROK airfields, including Cheju International (on Cheju Island, 473 km from the DMZ), are within the operating radius of the An-2.

The KPA's four reconnaissance brigades which are deployed within the "forward" corps are the elite of the SPF. They are tasked with a wide variety of strategic/theatre/global-level reconnaissance and special operations missions. Reconnaissance operations would be carried out by reconnaissance team of 3-10 members conducting independent long-range patrols in much the same manner as current US long-range surveillance units. These teams would typically be inserted with the assistance of either the KPN or the KPAF. Reconnaissance teams would also provide support for other SPF operations by conducting pre-mission reconnaissance, raids, ambushes, etc. Special operations would primarily consist of "direct action" and diversionary operations. "Direct action" teams will attempt to "decapitate" the ROK political and the ROK/US military command and control systems by the assassination or abduction of senior leaders. Diversionary operations seek to seize strategic

objectives before they can be destroyed, to destroy strategic objectives that cannot be destroyed by conventional means, and to create confusion and panic in rear areas. These operations would be carried out with reconnaissance brigade personnel being disguised partially or completely in ROKA uniforms or civilian clothing.

The KPA's five combined-arms brigades are primarily tasked with providing the nucleus of the DMZ breach/exploitation forces during a renewed KPA offensive. In this role they would clear a path across the DMZ through which regular ground force units may pass. As secondary missions the combined-arms brigades are tasked with the reduction of major ROK/US defensive zones, lines or positions hindering the advance of regular ground force units.

The primary area of operations for the combined-arms brigades would be within V Corps where they would probably attack along the following routes;

- P'yongyang—Kumhwa or Ch'orwon—Uijongbu—Seoul.
- Sangnyong-Ni—Yonch'on—Tongduch'on—Uijongbu—Seoul.
- Ch'unch'on—Wonju—Yeuju—Osan and Suwon.

These operations would be conducted in concert with amphibious light infantry brigades landing along the coast or airborne light infantry brigades landing behind ROK/US defensive positions. These units would seek to interdict ROK/US forces and secure tactically important terrain features such as bridges, crossroads, etc., ahead of the advancing combined-arms brigades.

Summary

Since their inception the KPA's Special Purpose Forces have undergone many changes and are presently tasked with a wide variety of missions. The importance of these elite forces in the KPA's strategic thinking, however, has remained constant. The DPRK leadership envisages a war of reunification taking place on two "fronts": the first "front" located along the DMZ engaging conventional troops and the second being the warfare waged behind ROK defences by these skilled warriors. The fact that 15 per cent of the total KPA ground forces comprise these highly trained troops is a testimony to their potential importance. It is this fact, coupled with their extensive "extra-peninsula" activities, that identifies the Special Purpose Forces as significant contributors to the overall military capability of the DPRK and a threat on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

Notes

1 Kulloia, February 1967, p. 35. Cited in: Han Sung-joo, "The Political Role of the Military in North Korea", in *North Korea Today*, edited Robert A. Scalapino and Kim Jun-yop, pp. 133-141.

2 This compares with a total US special operations force of 48,300 (including reserves and National Guard); and a Soviet force of approximately 29,500-37,400 (including reserves). Neither of these figures include traditional airborne units. Collins, John M. *Green Berets, SEALs & Spetsnaz: US & Soviet Special Military Operations*, Pergamon-Brassey's, 1987, pp. 19 and 33.

3 Since the strictest definition of unconventional warfare operations includes guerrilla warfare involving primarily indigenous personnel, escape and evasion, and subversion, it must be pointed out that these units do not at present employ or train ROK agents for guerrilla

warfare. These forces do not engage in espionage which is the responsibility of agents from the KWP—Liaison Department.

4 "Details of Burma Bombing Revealed in Confession", *The Korea Herald*, 27 November 1983, pp. 4-5.

5 Defence Intelligence Agency. "North Korean Special Purpose Forces", DDB-1100-475-84, May 1984, p. 4.

6 US Army. *North Korea: A Country Study*, DAPam 550-81, 1976, p. 224.

7 Ibid.; and US Army, "North Korean Armed Forces", DAPam 30-52, 11 July 1962, p. 1.

8 The Armour Command is frequently identified as the Mechanised Command.

9 A "forward" corps, is a corps that has frontage on the DMZ. These include I, II and V Corps. Additionally, since IV Corps has a sea frontage on the DMZ, it is sometimes also considered a "forward" corps. These units have also been identified as "DMZ" corps, "group" corps, or "front area/forward group" corps.

10 Although, there is some evidence to suggest that VIII Special Purpose Corps' span of control may also include these units.

11 Although designated throughout this book as brigades of a specific type, the KPA, in fact, may assign these SPF units no distinction other than a numerical designator and the title "Unit" (i.e. 73rd Unit).

12 "North Korean Special Purpose Forces", p. 2, and "Why Korea is Scared", *Foreign Report*, 4 February 1981, No. 1666, p. 4.

13 "North Korean Special Purpose Forces", p. 4.

Chapter Two

History of the Special Purpose Forces

“Our People’s Army was founded with these patriotic fighters of the anti-Japanese armed struggle as its backbone and on the basis of revolutionary patriotic traditions and valuable experiences. For this reason, the Korean People’s Army is the successor to the anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle.”—Kim Il-sung¹

Introduction

The origins of the KPA’s Special Purpose Forces and their unique unconventional warfare and special operations capabilities can be traced back to the roots of the Korean People’s Army and the training of its leadership. During the forty-nine years since the establishment of the Korean Volunteer Army in Yen-an, China, and the thirty-nine years since Kim Il-sung assumed leadership, the KPA’s unconventional warfare and special operations capabilities have continually evolved to produce today’s Special Purpose Forces. This evolution can be broadly divided into three periods:

- 1939–1962: Birth, war and reconstruction of the KPA
- 1962–1968: Guerrilla war within the ROK
- 1968–Present: VIII Special Purpose Corps

These three periods generally coincide with the “three revolutionary stages”, as envisaged by Kim Il-sung:²

- (1) Political, economic and military consolidation of the revolutionary base in the northern half [of the Korean Peninsula]: 1953–1962.
- (2) Strengthening of the revolutionary capability in the southern half [of the Korean Peninsula]: 1962–69.
- (3) Coupling of the potential for international revolution with the revolutionary potential of the Korean People: 1970–Present.

1939–1962: Birth, war and reconstruction of the KPA

General

The KPA evolved primarily from two distinct and competing political/military bans (power holding groups). The individuals who emerged as leaders from

these groups, with their political ideals and combat experiences, provided the foundation upon which the KPA's present day unconventional warfare and special operations capabilities were built. These two competing political/military bans consisted of what have become known as the *Yenan* and *Kaspen Bans*.³ The *Yenan Ban* consisted of those Koreans who in general were followers of Mao Zédong (MaoTse-tung) and who had fought with the Communist Chinese Forces during the Second World War and the Chinese Revolution. The *Kaspen Ban* was formed primarily from Korean partisans who fled from the Japanese to the Soviet Union and a number of Soviet citizens of Korean ancestry.

*The Kaspen Ban*⁴

The history of the *Kaspen Ban* is essentially the history of Kim Il-sung who is President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, General Secretary of the Korean Worker's Party and Commander-in-Chief of the Korean People's Army.

Kim Il-sung's early history is shrouded in mystery, starting with his real name which is Kim Sung Chu [excepting this section, Kim Sung Chu will always be referred to as Kim Il-sung]. The real Kim Il-sung was a revered folk hero of all Koreans. He was born in 1885 and, had he lived, would have been 63 years old when Kim Sung Chu was elected Premier in 1948. Kim Il-sung was the second son of Kim Chun Han whose home was in South Kyongsan Province, Korea. When quite young he went to Japan, eventually entering the Japanese Military Academy. However, before graduating he returned to Korea and became a guerrilla leader fighting against the Japanese. His classmates in the Military Academy, all of whom were colonels or generals at the time of the Japanese surrender in 1945, stated that he demonstrated great ability as a tactician. His raids against the Japanese forces in Korea became legendary. Eventually, extreme pressure by Japanese forces forced him to flee to northern Manchuria where he continued his successes, becoming known to the Japanese as "The Tiger of Chang Pek San" (the mountain where his headquarters was located). He died in Manchuria in the spring of 1935.

Kim Sung Chu, now known as Kim Il-sung, was born in April 1910, the eldest of three sons of a farmer named Kim Hung Jin. His father took part in the 1918 uprising against the Japanese in Seoul. He was caught and placed in jail where he eventually died. Kim Sung Chu, and his brothers, then fled to Manchuria where he attended a middle school in Kirin. Leaving school in 1929, before he graduated, he joined the Communist Party in Kirin and was appointed local secretary of the Communist Young Man's League of East Manchuria. It was during this period that he began his career as a guerrilla leader and was for some time a member of Wu I-cheng's guerrilla army. During the early 1930s Wu I-cheng and other Korean guerrillas were very active against the Japanese in eastern Manchuria. He was undoubtedly a very able guerrilla, and thus came to the attention of the real Kim Il-sung. The younger Kim was active in arranging an alliance with the North Manchuria forces (commanded by Kim Il-sung before his death) and in 1936 an allied anti-Japanese force was established. The Second and Sixth Corps of this guerrilla army appear to have been composed predominantly of Koreans and in 1938 Kim Sung Chu became commander of the Sixth Corps. On 4 June 1937 a battle took place between guerrillas and Japanese troops near the town of Kaspen, Yanggang-do Province, close to

the Manchurian border. During this battle two companies of Japanese troops were wiped out; a very significant victory for the guerillas and hence the name *Kaspen Ban*.⁵ Kim Sung Chu was very active in guerrilla operations until 1939 when he and his troops were driven out by the Japanese and fled to Soviet territory. Definite information concerning Kim's activities during his stay in the USSR are sparse. However, it is believed that he attended a Soviet military academy, was commissioned as a captain, and actually took part in the defence of Stalingrad, being decorated for his service there.

In August 1945 Kim Sung Chu, with a force of approximately 500 supporters, returned to northern Korea as a captain in the Soviet Army.⁶ While his followers quickly spread throughout the country (many operating "undercover") to establish a popular base of power, Kim cultivated a friendship with Cho Man Sik, an able Korean nationalist and the most respected non-communist leader in northern Korea. Kim Sung Chu convinced Cho that he was a fervent nationalist and did not believe in the communist plans for Korea. Convinced of Kim Il-sung's sincerity, Cho introduced Kim at a liberation celebration in P'yongyang on 3 October 1945 as Kim Il-sung, describing him as an ardent Korean patriot and nationalist. Cho's reputation assured Kim of an enthusiastic reception from the general public which did not stop to consider that the real Kim Il-sung was dead or must have been a much older man if still alive.

Kim immediately became popular and later the same month, with full Soviet support, secured leadership of the Korean Workers' Party from local Korean communists and its titular head, Pak Hon Yong. The old Korean revolutionaries and nationalists soon found themselves out in the cold, being used and discarded at will (often being imprisoned or executed). With Kim Sung Chu as head of the party and the state apparatus, Soviet-Koreans and Soviet-trained fellow partisans of Kim infiltrated the Communist Party organisation and the national and provincial state administration. Thus, they and the Soviets were able to secure and maintain complete control without using large numbers of Soviet personnel.

When the Provisional People's Committee was established in February 1946 Kim, as its chairman, announced the 20-point political programme. In July, Kim was elected Chairman of the North Korean Democratic and Racial Unity Front. The Provisional People's Committee was reorganised into the People's Committee in 1947 and he retained the chairmanship, later publishing the people's economic programme for the fiscal year 1947. When the members of the Korean Committee of the United Nations came to Korea in January 1948, he was chosen as one of the nine political leaders to be consulted but he did not meet them. With the establishment of the DPRK Government on 8 September 1948, he was elected to the post of Premier of the Cabinet, the head of the executive organ. In February-March 1949 he went to Moscow and concluded agreements for increased military, economic and cultural assistance. On 25 June 1950 the DPRK attacked the Republic of Korea and on 4 July 1950 Kim was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the DPRK Armed Forces by the Presidium of the DPRK Government.

Non-Communists who knew Kim during this period generally described him as a roughneck, poorly educated, poor at languages and having little administrative ability. He was, however, an able and ruthless guerrilla leader.

The Yen-an Ban⁷

The roots of the Yen-an Ban date back to 1939 when an organisation known as the Korean Volunteer Army (KVA) was formed in Yen-an, China, under Kim Du Bong and Kim Mu Chong.⁸ The army at this time was composed of thirty charter members and was commanded by Kim Mu Chong. At the same time, a school was established near Yen-an for training military and political leaders for a future independent Korea. By 1945 the KVA had grown to approximately 1,000 men, mostly Korean deserters from the Japanese Army. During this period the KVA fought alongside the Chinese Communist Forces from which it drew arms and ammunition. Following the defeat of the Japanese, the KVA accompanied the Chinese Communist Forces into Manchuria intending to gain recruits from the Korean population of Manchuria and then enter Korea. By incorporating local Korean self-defence groups into the KVA, it reached a strength of approximately 2,500 men in September 1945. With this group Kim Mu Chong attempted to enter northern Korea through Sinuiju in late September 1945 only to be halted and have his group disarmed by the Soviet Army. Reportedly, Kim Mu Chong was told by the Soviet officers that he could not bring armed forces into Korea, but that the arms would be returned if he would take his group back into Manchuria and fight the Nationalists. Forced to accept the Soviet decision, Kim Mu Chong returned to Manchuria and continued to strengthen his army. The Soviet attitude in this situation was motivated not only by their desire to assist Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Forces in their battle against the Nationalists, but also to keep this well equipped, well trained, and politically indoctrinated force out of Korea, thereby facilitating the consolidation of northern Korea's leadership within the hands of their own candidate, Kim Il-sung, and his Kaspen Ban (Kim had just returned to Korea in August 1945).

By October 1945 the KVA had grown to approximately 5,000 men. A reorganisation took place which resulted in the army being divided into three brigades and one battalion: 1st South Manchurian Brigade, 3rd North Manchurian Brigade, 5th East Manchurian Brigade, and the Independent Battalion.

The Independent Battalion was to be stationed in Chinchon on the Darien Peninsula but, due to the advance of the Chinese Nationalist Army in that area, this unit never materialised and the personnel later joined the 1st South Manchurian Brigade. In January 1946 the 5th East Manchurian Brigade was divided into the East Chilin and the Yenchi Brigades. Through the continued efforts of Kim Mu Chong and his followers, the KVA continued to expand. Additional local security groups were absorbed and by April 1946 each brigade numbered approximately 5,400 men. During this period, the KVA participated in numerous small scale actions against the Nationalist Army.

In April 1946 the Chinese Communist armies in China and Manchuria underwent a considerable reorganisation which resulted in the dropping of the title "Korean Volunteer Army". The units of the KVA became subordinate to the various area commands of the so-called northeast "Democratic United Army". For example, the 5th East Manchurian Brigade became part of the East Kirin Peace Preservation Army. This Peace Preservation Army was in turn under the control of the Kirin Military District. The purely Korean composition of the original army also changed after the reorganisation when Chinese and Mongolians were mixed into what were formerly Korean units.

Beginning in the late Spring of 1946, the cadres for the newly forming Korean

Peace Preservation Corps (i.e. Korean People's Army) began moving into northern Korea. The highest ranking Korean officers of the Chinese Communist Forces, members of the old KVA and Koreans in the Soviet Army were assembled in various training centres in northern Korea under the supervision of the Soviet Army advisers, to train the new recruits for the Peace Preservation Corps. Because of the exodus of so many leaders, the efficiency of the former KVA units dropped considerably. By the Spring of 1947, weakened by further officer transfers to northern Korea, the units were relegated to a line-of-communications role until they too were transferred into northern Korea to become part of the Korean People's Army. Despite the fact that the KVA officially passed out of existence in April 1946, the title, and those of the original KVA units, continued to be used until much later, possibly encouraged by the authorities for security and morale purposes.

Partisan warfare/guerrilla warfare

Despite the Yenantes' superiority in numbers, ideological indoctrination and military experience, they were unable to secure a dominant position in the new government because of the strong Soviet presence and their support of Kim Il-sung's *Kaspen Ban*. They were, however, able to secure a number of prominent positions in both the new government and the army. This resulted in, among other things, a dual approach to unconventional warfare being practiced within the army with the doctrine espoused by the Kaspenites generally being the more dominant.

The Yen-an *Ban*'s doctrine was based upon Mao Zedong's pamphlet, "Guerrilla Warfare", and upon experiences gained during the Chinese revolution.⁹ Mao's concept, refined during his days in Yen-an, placed heavy emphasis on the political indoctrination and education and mobilisation of the peasant class, with guerrilla leaders spending . . .

. . . a great deal more time in organisation, instruction, agitation and propaganda work than they do fighting, for their most important job was to win over the people. "We must patiently explain," said Mao Tse-tung. "Explain", "persuade", "discuss", "convince"—these words recur with monotonous regularity in many of the Chinese essays on guerrilla war. Mao has aptly compared guerrillas to fish, and people to the water in which they swim. If the political temperature is right, the fish, however few in number, will thrive and proliferate. It is, therefore, the principle concern of all guerrilla leaders to get the water to the right temperature and to keep it there.¹⁰

Only when this political temperature was right would the guerrilla leaders move into the active military phase, but the political aspect of the struggle remained the prime objective.

In comparison, the *Kaspen Ban*'s concept tended to minimise the political aspects of the struggle, emphasising military operations based upon the needs of the country and the military. This concept, which best typifies today's SPF operations, was based upon the Soviet Second World War doctrine of partisan warfare. This Soviet doctrine called for the formation of small partisan units of 75-150 men and women within occupied areas to ferment unrest and provide intelligence. The basic combat formations of these partisan units were the company and the platoon. Their basic missions, carried out as a rule at night or

from ambush, were attacks on columns and concentrations of motorised infantry, on dumps and ammunition transport, on airfields, on railway transport, to blow bridges and roads, damage telephone and telegraph lines, set fire to forests, stores, and transport, and to generally make conditions unbearable throughout the German rear.¹¹

The net effect of the different approaches of the *Kaspen* and *Yenan Bans* to unconventional warfare was manifested in the way in which a particular KPA unit would conduct such operations was dependent upon the political orientation of its commander, and to a lesser degree upon that of the lower ranks. Those units whose commanders were from the former Korean Volunteer Army and the *Yenan Ban* tended to practice Mao's "Guerrilla Warfare", while those units whose commanders belonged to the *Kaspen Ban* or who had been trained by the Soviets practiced a version of partisan warfare.

*Unconventional warfare activity during the Fatherland Liberation War*¹²

From the very beginning of the Fatherland Liberation War, KPA unconventional warfare operations were intensive and played a significant role in all operations. These activities were controlled by four distinct yet inter-related chains of command. The first was that of the KWP's Central Committee's Liaison Department, which controlled a heterogeneous collection of Korean Communist guerrilla units operating in the ROK through its Guerrilla Guidance Section, and KWP intelligence agents through its Military Section.¹³ The second flowed through the Third Department of the KPA Intelligence Department's Reconnaissance Bureau. The Third Department controlled more structured guerrilla groups which were engaged primarily in the collection of military intelligence. The third chain of command originated in each KPA infantry division, which had an organic guerrilla unit. These operated primarily as reconnaissance units rather than as traditional guerrillas and were seldom divorced from the parent unit. Forming the fourth category of guerrilla unit were those specially trained unconventional warfare units directly subordinate to the General Staff Department.

All guerrilla units varied greatly in size, organisation, equipment, and quality. It is estimated that, in addition to the division-level units, there were 5,000 guerrillas and agents operating within the ROK (led by a core of some 1,700 KWP-indoctrinated personnel) and at least two GHQ-level unconventional warfare units: the 766th Independent Unit and the 945th Independent Marine Regiment.¹⁴

Operations at the beginning of the war initially displayed a good degree of co-operation between the various guerrilla units and controlling headquarters; however, this would change as the war progressed. The actions of the 766th Independent Unit (and elements of the 945th Independent Marine Regiment) during the Fatherland Liberation War had a significant impact upon the opening stages of the fighting and influenced the future development of the SPF. They are worth recounting.

*766th Independent Unit*¹⁵

Shortly before the Fatherland Liberation War there occurred a general reorganisation, during which a number of GHQ-level unconventional warfare and marine infantry units were created. Two such were the 945th and 766th Regiments, which are believed to have been activated during July 1949 at Wonsan.

On 24 June 1950 the 766th (and elements of the 945th) were divided into three forces under direct control of GHQ. One force would cross the 38th parallel, leading the 5th Infantry Division's attack south along the east coast. The remaining two forces embarked at Yangyang for amphibious landings at Pusan, Kangnung and Samch'ok the following morning. Once landed these units were to disperse into the hills, thence they would harass the UNC's rear, by the destruction of railway tracks at crossings, bridges, tunnels, curves and switch-points, the disruption of telephone and telegraph services, and provide intelligence.

The force that was to be landed northeast of Pusan was a reinforced battalion-sized unit of 600 men and was embarked upon a coastal steamer.

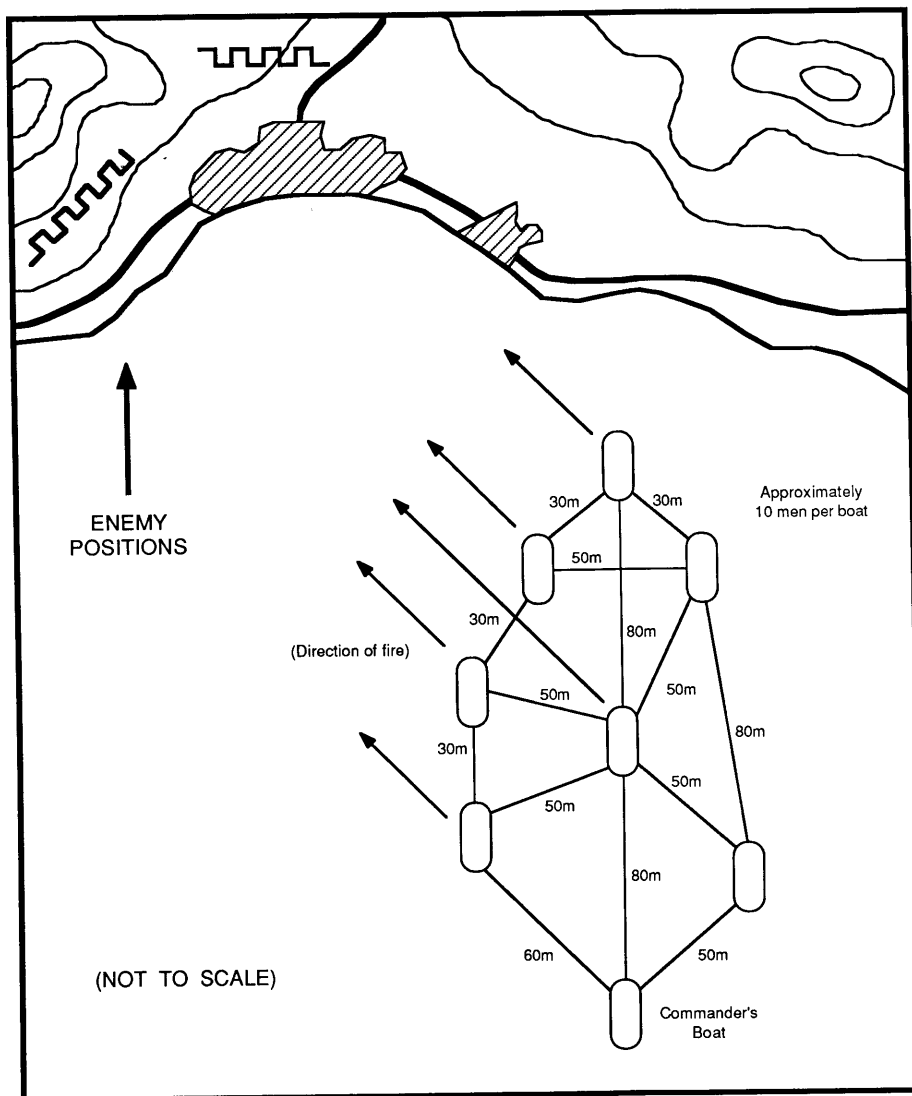
"On . . . the evening of the 25th there took place the most important surface engagement of the war. Northeast of Pusan [the ROKN submarine chaser] PC 701, Commander Nam Choi Yong, ROKN, encountered a 1,000 ton armed steamer with some 600 troops embarked, and sank it after a running fight. Since Pusan, the only major port of entry available for the movement of supplies and reinforcements to ROK, was at this time almost defenceless, the drowning of the 600 was an event of profound importance."¹⁶

Had this landing been successful, and the port of Pusan seized (a distinct possibility), the course of the conflict would have been significantly altered.

The landings at Kangnung and Samch'ok were conducted by company-sized units of 80 men each using large numbers of small coastal craft. These units had the mission of establishing beachheads along the east coast in the rear of the ROKA in order to disrupt rear area communications and defences. When their mission had been accomplished, and contact had been established with the other elements of the parent unit, the reconstituted unit was then to infiltrate through the mountains in the direction of Pusan to join the battalion landed there.¹⁷

With the 766th leading, the 5th Infantry Division crossed the 38th Parallel and entered Chumunjin without incident shortly before noon on 25 June 1950. Continuing the drive south, both units entered Kangnung on 26 June 1950 after an all-night battle. With the 766th still leading the attack, both units continued south until they reached the approaches to Samch'ok. Here the 766th was joined by elements which had made an amphibious landing near the town. The reconstituted unit then proceeded into the hills from where the troops, after changing into civilian clothes, infiltrated into Samch'ok in order to gather intelligence. The division entered Samch'ok on about 5 July 1950. On 9 July 1950, after a large-scale engagement which involved the 766th only, the division and the 766th occupied Ulchin.

The 766th, after undergoing a reorganisation at Ulchin, infiltrated small units westward into the mountains with the mission of cutting communications between Pusan and Taegu, and P'ohang. It continued to operate as the spearhead for the 5th, and later 12th, Infantry Division in the P'ohang area for two months of intensive and costly fighting. During 17-19 August 1950 both the 12th and the 766th, after having suffered serious losses, were reorganised. During this reorganisation, the 766th was disbanded and its personnel absorbed by the 12th Division. The 945th, after suffering significant losses, was also disbanded in August 1950 and incorporated into the 24th (249th) Brigade.



Company amphibious landing operation, 1950.

Other unconventional warfare operations

KPA infantry divisions employed their guerrilla units intensively throughout the war. During normal combat operations, members dressed in standard KPA uniforms and carried the usual weapons. However, to reconnoitre towns, villages and rear areas of UNC forces in daylight, members would wear civilian dress or ROKA uniforms. These soldiers returned to the hills before dark and guided the main body back to the objective. In the approach to the objective, three scouts were sent out first, each approximately five metres apart. Companies were separated by 20 to 25 metres, platoons by 15–20 metres and

squads by about 10 metres. After the attack, the guerrillas withdrew into the hills before daylight. At other times, guerrilla units mingled with refugees and infiltrated into UNC rear lines. At a predetermined point, they would separate from the civilian column and assemble their weapons which had been hidden in oxcarts and bundles. After the reconnaissance of the target was complete an attack was launched. Units were given specific missions and a specific time limit to accomplish each assignment. These units also provided guides for the infiltration of "enveloping units" behind UNC lines.

With the success of the 15 September 1950 Inch'on landing and subsequent breakout from the Pusan perimeter by the UNC, many cut-off KPA units attempted to escape northward. Some were unable to do so and established their own guerrilla units or joined forces with existing KWP guerrilla units, with additional Communist sympathisers and KWP members also forming their ranks. The latter two groups generally gave logistical support and carried out espionage missions. In November 1950 it was estimated that there were 40,000 guerrillas within the ROK.

UNC operations soon dispersed these forces, precipitating their reorganisation into six branch units (e.g. 1st Branch Unit, 2nd Branch Unit, . . . 6th Branch Unit). Each branch unit had from 600 to 4,000 men and was organised along military lines. The Guerrilla Guidance Section exercised limited control over the activities of the approximately 8,000 men in the branch units. In addition to the branch units, guerrilla bands controlled through the Military Section of the KWP Central Committee's Liaison Department operated throughout the western ROK. These guerrilla bands followed the loose organisation of the KWP and were nominally under its control. Each branch unit and guerrilla band established a base in the mountainous terrain within their area of operation. Security of the base depended upon guards at the base itself and spies in nearby villages. Although guerrilla forces were able to send and receive messages to and from the Guerrilla Guidance Section in the north, carried by couriers and almost always encoded, UNC forces captured or destroyed the majority of their radio transmitting stations.

The primary missions of these units were the disruption of the UNC war effort and the provision of intelligence. Communication and supply lines were attacked, villages were pillaged and raided, and Communist propaganda was disseminated. Food and ammunition were critical items, and desperate bands raided many villages out of necessity. Supplies were first gathered from sympathisers and, if this proved insufficient, they were supplemented by raids on farms or by the capture of UNC provisions. Hostages were also used to obtain contributions of food. Female guerrillas often purchased medical supplies at local markets. The practice of concentrating guerrilla forces in one area increased the animosity of the local population toward the guerrilla bands, resulting in the brutal treatment of captured guerrillas. Replacements for guerrilla bands were obtained by volunteers, kidnapped young men and women, hostages, and soldiers who infiltrated UNC lines. The Guerrilla Guidance Section continually attempted to infiltrate new units south to reinforce the established branch units. For example, on 23 January 1951 the 4th Battalion of the 503rd Engineer Regiment, under the command of Major Pak Ki Ho, was detached and departed from P'yongyang for Ch'unch'on. Here it was attached to the 6th Branch Unit, whose area of operations covered the Cholla-Namdo District situated in the southwest corner of the Korean Peninsula. The battalion was met by representatives of the branch unit in the vicinity of

Ch'unch'on and under their guidance infiltrated through UNC lines on 10 February. It then proceeded toward the 6th Branch Unit's base around Chiri-San.¹⁸

It was not until the Inch'on landing and the subsequent breakout from the Pusan perimeter, that UNC forces were able to conduct serious counter-guerrilla operations. KPA guerrilla activities led UNC forces to divert large tactical units, divisions or larger in some cases, to secure rear areas. Since guerrilla forces typically possessed few, if any, heavy weapons, armour was frequently employed against them. By studying the movement of the guerrilla forces, UNC troops were often able to block guerrilla routes of withdrawal. Initially platoon and company-sized patrols were used to combat guerrilla forces, but these proved to be too small. Later, regiments and divisions were employed with good success. Operations would typically consist of deploying one battalion, organised for perimeter defence, along a suspected route of the withdrawal. Then the remainder of the regiment, or division, would encircle the area in which the guerrillas were known to operate, forcing the guerrillas to retreat into the pre-deployed battalion.

On 19 July 1950, the office of Coordinator, Protection of Lines of Communication, Rear Areas, was set up by the Eighth United States Army Korea. Its mission was to coordinate ROK and US efforts to protect railways, roads and bridges. It also protected UNC signals communication units against sabotage and guerrilla operations. One of the first steps taken by this office was to form Korean Police Battalions. At first, one provisional ROK police company was assigned to the 24th and 25th US Infantry Divisions with the mission of procuring local guides, securing information on KPA guerrillas and familiarising the respective commanding generals with local terrain conditions and road networks. After approximately two months, the ROK police companies were returned to the ROK National Police.¹⁹

ROK Security Battalions and the Korean National Police fought guerrillas in rear areas. They were under the operational control of the ROKA, and supported logistically by it. Arms and ammunition for the National Police were furnished by the US Army. Both had the mission of guarding fixed installations and conducting anti-guerrilla operations. ROK Security Battalions were attached to the T'aebaek-San Command which had the mission of guarding two strategic passes on main supply routes, the Tanyang and Munyong passes, and to the Sonan Command. This command was activated in June 1951 at the insistence of the ROKA to combat guerrillas in that area.

In addition to guards at VHF stations, which were prize targets for guerrilla raids, wire, booby-traps and mines were extensively employed. Each rear area organisation had a standard operating procedure which it followed during a guerrilla raid. Security platoons rode railway trains. Flat or gondola cars, carrying machine guns and crews, were placed on the front and rear of some trains. Hospital trains had two gondolas in front, the first to explode any mines on the tracks, the second carried machine guns and crews. When a guerrilla unit attacked a village or installation, the National Police would respond immediately to pursue the attacking force. ROK Security Battalions did not. When a guerrilla force was definitely located, the area was surrounded and UNC air strikes were called in. After the air raid, the National Police units cleaned out the area. Often such attacks were jointly conducted with the assistance of ROK Security Battalions. In addition to physically contacting the guerrillas, the National Police maintained agents in towns and provinces suspected of harbouring guerrillas. Pamphlets guaranteeing safe conduct were

distributed by land and air in the same areas to induce guerrillas to surrender. The results of National Police counter-guerrilla operations during the first 14 months (25 June 50 to 31 August 51) of the war provide an indication of the intensity of KPA guerrilla operations:²⁰

Enemy killed	67,228
Enemy captured	23,837
Enemy surrendered	44,154
Total	135,219
Enemy heavy weapons captured	1,650
Enemy rifles captured	22,571
Police killed	1,900
Police kidnapped	225
Police missing	6,866
Total	8,991
Police heavy weapons captured	90
Police rifles captured	2,300

The intervention of the CVA in October 1950 changed the nature of unconventional warfare operations. With the KPA virtually destroyed, and Kim Il-sung sitting impotent in Kanggye, the *Yenan Ban*, with the assistance of the CVA, assumed a dominant position and its concept of "Guerrilla Warfare" generally became the norm. The Chinese units brought with them their own guerrilla units which not only conducted military operations behind UNC lines but attempted to win over the local populace and establish bases in the remote mountainous areas of the ROK. The entry of the CVA also allowed for the reorganisation and reconstruction of the KPA to begin. The first concrete results of this reorganisation were the deployment of II and VII (KPA) Corps (understrength) along the eastern sector of the front, and the numerous small amphibious raids being conducted by the KPA along both coasts.²¹ All these amphibious raids demonstrated reasonably good planning and implementation. Small craft were massed without being detected and operations were skillfully timed. Artillery support was well co-ordinated and on at least one occasion the landing force reached shore without detection.²²

During 1952-53 the CVA, along with the KPA GHQ, tried to reorganise all branch and guerrilla units operating within the ROK by sending teams throughout the peninsula in an attempt to support and indoctrinate these isolated units, thus creating a united guerrilla army under the banner of "Guerrilla Warfare". Although dispersed and isolated, these guerrilla units were a significant nuisance to UNC rear area operations. In fact the 1st ROK Infantry Division was pulled out of the front line in July 1952 to conduct counter-guerrilla operations. During the next three months (August to October) the division claimed approximately 300-400 guerrillas killed and an equal number captured. Yet the guerrillas continued to operate against the UNC rear. However, the guerrilla efforts met with decreasing success due to continuing UNC counter-guerrilla operations and the fact that many of the guerrilla units were by this time reduced to tired, hungry bandit groups struggling just to survive.

With the signing of the 1953 Armistice Agreement several events occurred concurrently: Kim Il-sung immediately affixed the onus of defeat upon his rivals, the KPA initiated a major reorganisation and reconstruction programme, and the initiation of a gradual Koreanisation of KPA doctrine.

Kim's efforts were directed primarily against the Yenantes and, because of the *Kaspen Ban*'s superior organisational skills, he was able to purge a large number of low level officers and officials. This advantage could not be initially exploited to its fullest due to the popularity of some of the Yenante leaders (especially within the military) and the presence of the CVA. However, this purge gradually gained momentum with dramatic increases during late 1957, and peaked with the abortive 1958 *coup d'état* by Lieutenant-General Chang P'yong-san (a Yenante).²³ Following this purge and the withdrawal of the CVA later the same year, the KPA and the KWP was under the firm control of Kim Il-sung and his followers.

The major reorganisation and reconstruction programme saw the demobilisation of thousands of men and woman from KPA service to enter into the economic development of the war-ravaged economy.²⁴ This programme, which began in earnest during 1956, resulted in an overall reduction in KPA manpower strength but not combat capability. This paradox resulted from a consolidation of combat units and the return of the navy and air force personnel who were previously stationed and training in China and the Soviet Union. In the case of unconventional warfare units, the situation was confused as competing CVA and DPRK military and intelligence commands remained actively engaged in operations against the ROK. The wide diversity of command headquarters was a by-product of the struggle for power within the government and the desire to maintain an intelligence gathering capability within the ROK. During the years immediately following the Armistice, attempts were made to reorganise operational units, and it is believed that the few remaining guerrilla bands were absorbed into the branch units, while a number of miscellaneous reconnaissance and intelligence units were formed into "sniper" units. These "sniper" units were tasked with a wide variety of intelligence and reconnaissance missions.

The gradual Koreanisation of KPA doctrine resulted not only from the above factors but from the desire to use the KPA's limited resources to develop a modern army based upon such Soviet doctrine as was suitable to the KPA's requirements and upon an evaluation of the wartime failures of guerrilla and partisan warfare operations within the ROK. These shortcomings were blamed primarily upon the inadequacy of the ideological and military training within the guerrilla units and their failure to apply Mao's principles. However there were other factors:

- The KPA employed its guerrilla units primarily for military operations, with political considerations being secondary.
- The effectiveness of UNC counter-guerrilla operations which forced the guerrilla units into the position of resorting to banditry to survive. This in turn alienated the local population without whose support all efforts were doomed.
- The failure to modify these doctrines to the conditions prevailing on the Korean Peninsula. Guerrilla and partisan warfare are premised upon the idea of indigenous support. The majority of the KPA's and CVA's guerrilla forces were not "southerners" and so were viewed as foreigners in much the same way as the Koreans viewed the Japanese.

The above factors were reflected in both a dissolution and a wide diversity of unconventional warfare efforts which consisted of anything from 2-3 man military raids to larger insertions into the mountainous areas with the object of

establishing guerrilla bases. The majority of these attempts failed due to UNC counter-guerrilla operations and a lack of any overall co-ordination. This lack of co-ordination was serious and it resulted in a number of operations being in opposition to one another. With few successful operations, the few remaining units south of the DMZ were either tracked down and eliminated or forced to retreat to the north. Only a few extremely dedicated small units remained south of the DMZ, and these were primarily engaged in intelligence operations.

Reorganisation of unconventional warfare and intelligence assets

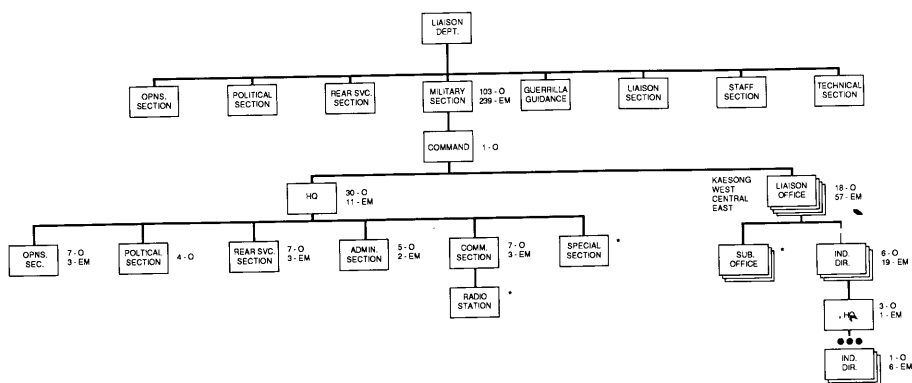
By the time of the CVA withdrawal in 1958, a Koreanised version of "Guerrilla Warfare" had slowly established itself, displacing "Partisan Warfare" and "Guerrilla Warfare". At the same time unconventional warfare and intelligence operations were reorganised and placed under the auspices of several, yet still competing, organisations, including the National Intelligence Committee chaired by Kim Il-sung, the Cabinet Intelligence Committee, the KWP—Liaison Department, the Reconnaissance Bureau, the General Political Bureau, and the Security Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.²⁵

The National Intelligence Committee, chaired by Kim Il-sung, appears to have been the overall administrative co-ordinating agency for all intelligence and unconventional warfare activities. It would delegate various responsibilities, operations and missions to the subordinate agencies.

The Cabinet Intelligence Committee was the central authority for all agent activity. This agency collected information from the other intelligence agencies and disseminated finished intelligence products to all DPRK government agencies.

The KWP Liaison Department functioned as an operational control agency over its own intelligence units and those of the Security Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Reconnaissance Bureau. Some KPA personnel were also attached to the Liaison Department to function as escorts. This department also conducted background investigations and trained personnel for these intelligence units.²⁶ The Liaison Department was organised into eight sections, of which the Military and Guerrilla Guidance sections were the most important. The Military Section was foremost among the agencies with

Liaison Department, Korean Workers' Party.

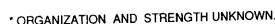


* ORGANIZATION AND STRENGTH UNKNOWN.

The Reconnaissance Bureau, in conjunction with the KWP Liaison Department, had the main responsibility of keeping the General Staff Department and Ministry of National Defence (now the Ministry of People's Armed Forces) informed about the enemy situation and capabilities. However, the Reconnaissance Bureau was primarily concerned with the collection of military intelligence and the provision of escorts for the intelligence units of the Liaison Department and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (now the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Security) as well as maintaining close liaison with them.²⁷ The Reconnaissance Bureau was organised into a command element and three departments (First, Second and Third). The Third Department was responsible for military reconnaissance and special operations within the ROK. It was organised into a headquarters and three regional offices (Foot Reconnaissance Centres, also known as Foot Reconnaissance Stations/Bases or Infantry Reconnaissance Centres). Although the departments were under the direct control of the Ministry of National Defence through the Intelligence Department, the regional offices appear to have been under the control of Forward Area Group Corps headquarters (this designation was later changed to Forward Corps).

The General Political Bureau, although institutionally subordinate to the General Staff Department, was controlled by the KPA Central Committee, a component of the KWP. The main functions of the General Political Bureau were to conduct psychological warfare operations and propaganda activities against ROK/US civilian and military personnel as well as to direct the politi-

Reconnaissance Bureau, Intelligence Department.



cal education, indoctrination, morale and party activities of all service personnel. The main subordinate bureaux include Organisation, Statistics, Democratic Youth League, Propaganda and Instigation (agitation) and Enemy Affairs Guidance (psychological/warfare). Under the guidance of the latter two bureaux, the General Political Bureau conducted limited unconventional warfare operations.²⁹

Following the failure to exploit ROK vulnerabilities during the 1960 student uprisings against the Syngman Rhee government and the subsequent ROKA *coup d'état* of 16 May 1961, the intelligence agencies were reorganised. Partly as a result of this and partly as a by-product of the ongoing reorganisation within the KPA, a majority of the miscellaneous intelligence and unconventional warfare units were disbanded and two new types of unit were activated: the Foot Reconnaissance Brigade and the Light Infantry Regiment. The foot reconnaissance brigades were apparently formed around a cadre of former branch unit, guerrilla and "sniper" personnel. These new units, which totalled approximately 3,000 men, were subordinated to the Reconnaissance Bureau's three Foot Reconnaissance Centres. The light infantry regiments were apparently organised around disbanded corps/divisional-level reconnaissance and guerrilla units. These light infantry regiments were subordinated to the "forward area group" corps commanders.

Summary

This phase was characterised by the imitation initially of the Soviet "partisan" and then later Mao Zedong's "Guerrilla Warfare" doctrine. As is illustrated by the initial stages of the Korean Conflict being carried out in accordance with "partisan" doctrine, operations following the intervention of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army were carried out applying Mao Zedong's doctrine of "Guerrilla Warfare". Following the 1953 Armistice the unconventional warfare effort suffered due to both the confused political situation caused by the resumption of the internal power struggle and the gradual Koreanisation of the KPA doctrine, even though Mao's doctrine of "Guerrilla Warfare" generally prevailed due to the presence of the CVA. Despite several attempts at reorganisation and co-ordination this awkward situation continued until the purges of 1957-58 and the departure of the CVA in 1958. By this time, a noticeable change had occurred: while the number of unconventional warfare operations conducted was considerable, the measureable accomplishments were small.

The failure of the KPA to take advantage of the political turmoil within the ROK during 1961-62 was a turning point in the development of the unconventional warfare forces. It forced the abandonment of inadequate doctrine and organisations and the adoption of new ones tailored to the requirements of the Korean Peninsula. Despite all these tribulations this period was important because of the valuable unconventional warfare experience gained.

1962-1968: Guerrilla war within the ROK

General

The period from 1962-68 can be considered as the second of the three revolutionary stages, "strengthening of the revolutionary capability in the southern half [of the Korean Peninsula]." In December 1962, "... North Korea announced what might be called a military policy of self-defence and self-

reliance. It had three purposes: (1) to build up military capabilities that were supposed to be appropriate to North Korea's own needs and to circumstances in the Korean peninsula, (2) to develop an independent North Korean strategy, and (3) to establish a structure of defence and resistance that would serve in case of a counterattack or retaliation by South Korea and the United States of America following a DPRK attack on the South."³⁰ This led to the formation of a new military doctrine known as the "four great military lines", which required "... the arming of the whole people, the fortification of the entire country, the training of all soldiers as a cadre force, and the modernisation of arms".³¹

Guerrilla warfare

The KPA credited the new doctrine to a combination of Kim Il-sung's military genius and the experiences of his guerrillas during the "anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle" during the 1930s. However, it is more correct to assert that it developed from the continued Koreanisation of both conventional pre-nuclear Soviet military doctrine and Mao's "guerrilla warfare" doctrine. With unconventional warfare and special operations being heavily dependent upon the latter.

The development of this doctrine, as well as subsequent unconventional warfare operations against the ROK, were influenced by the dramatic internal changes taking place within the DPRK and by the 1962 "Cuban missile crisis", the Vietnam conflict, and the political situation within the ROK. With the resolution of the "Cuban missile crisis" in favour of the United States, the Soviet Union was seen to have "given in" to the United States rather than risk a military confrontation. The DPRK leadership began to wonder if, despite the signing of a peace and friendship treaty in 1961, the Soviet Union would come to its aid in the case of a renewed conflict on the Korean Peninsula.³² The Vietnam conflict, which was a laboratory for Mao's "guerrilla warfare", presented a very embarrassing situation to the DPRK. The Viet Cong had gained worldwide attention and support by steadily expanding their strength and frequently posing critical problems for the United States and the Republic of Vietnam.³³ In contrast, the DPRK which had a very large and established army had accomplished little. This situation became intolerable following the large scale student demonstrations against the ROK government during 1964 and 1965 and the ROKA's dispatch of combat troops to Vietnam in September 1965.³⁴

In response, the DPRK dramatically escalated its violations of the armistice agreement. This was apparently done in the hope that such provocations would draw the attention of the ROK Government back to the Korean Peninsula and thus force the return of ROKA combat troops. In this way the DPRK could receive credit for supporting the Viet Cong and People's Republic of Vietnam.³⁵ Additionally, the DPRK hoped to capitalise on the seemingly favourable political climate within the ROK (remembering the failure to do so during 1960-61), by "... strengthening the revolutionary capability in the southern half [of the Korean Peninsula]".

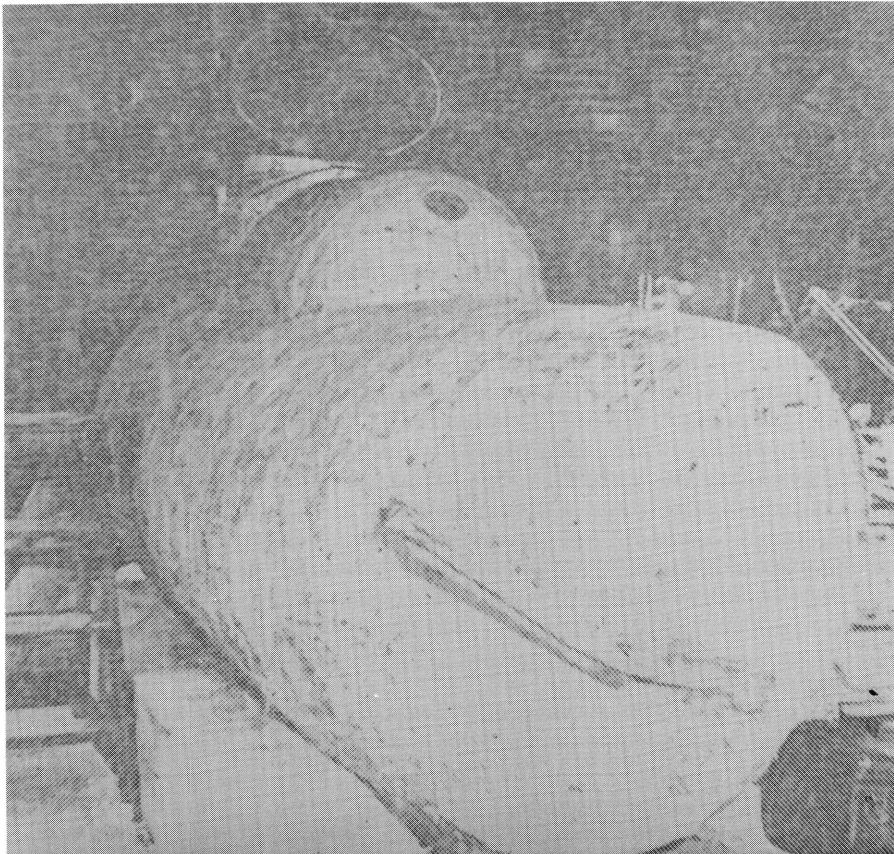
Starting in July of 1965 small groups began to be infiltrated into the ROK to explore opportunities for guerrilla war. In October 1966, at the Congress of Representatives of the KWP, under the name of "Revolution in South Korea", Kim presented the basis of the KPA's new doctrine of "combined operations" and the "two front war" and indicated the importance attached to unconventional warfare.

“... We must develop the revolutionary movement at this time using a combination of methods involving all kinds of struggle in correspondence to the objective and the subjective situation: political struggle and economic struggle; violent struggle and nonviolent struggle; and legal and illegal struggle”.³⁶

The “combined operations” doctrine called for the co-ordination of “guerrilla warfare” operations with conventional KPA ground-forces operations. The “two front war” doctrine called for the co-ordination of conventional front-line operations with guerilla operations deep within the ROK. The objective for both was to encircle and destroy the enemy on both the military and political levels.

The mid-1960s also saw the DPRK undertake the beginnings of its support of international revolutionary and terrorist organisations. This support was in the form of weapons transfers and military training, both within the DPRK and abroad. This training was conducted, for the most part, by members of the General Staff Department’s Reconnaissance Bureau and the various intelligence agencies.

Three-ton, two/three-man, 18.7ft-long DPRK midget submarine captured after it ran aground on a mudflat as the tide fell at the confluence of the Imjin and Han rivers on 5 July 1965. (Bradley-Hahn Collection)

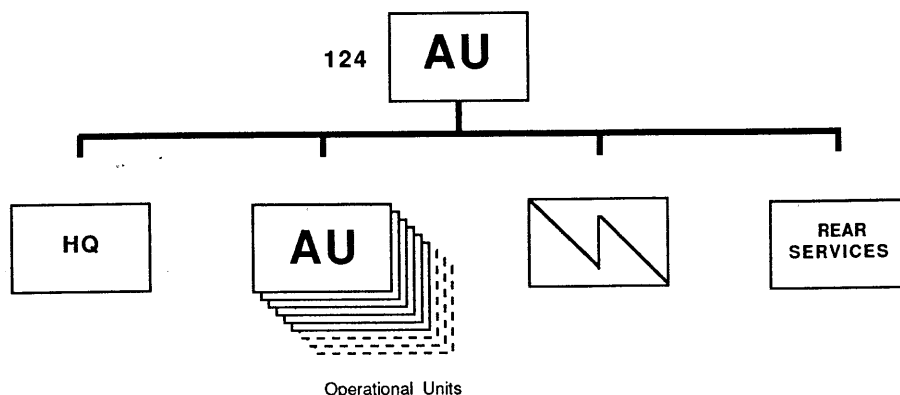


The ROK responded to the increasing number of KPA unconventional warfare operations during this period with the construction of a complex integrated barrier system south of the DMZ due to the lack of manpower to police the zone. It consisted of a 10ft-high chain-link fence anchored in concrete and topped by concertina barbed wire supplemented with minefields, ditches and electronic sensing devices. Reinforced watch towers, concrete bunkers and guard posts were established behind this fence overlooking the most frequented infiltration routes. Thousands of acres of brush were cleared along roads and fences, and around military positions within and adjacent to the southern boundary of the DMZ. In some places, chemical defoliants were used to control summer foliage.³⁷

By the end of 1965, KPA unconventional warfare forces had expanded to 12 regiment/brigade-sized units.³⁸ In response to ROK efforts to seal the DMZ to infiltration, the KPA initiated a major programme to develop its airborne and amphibious light infantry forces. Available information suggests that parachutist training began during the early 1960s and that by 1968 at least two airborne units had been activated.³⁹ These airborne units were apparently formed either from a cadre of personnel drawn from the 17th Reconnaissance Brigade or the 17th began a gradual process of being reconstituted as the 17th Airborne Light Infantry Brigade.⁴⁰ Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s the KPA possessed only a limited amphibious warfare capability. Such operations were launched along the east and west coasts of the ROK using fishing craft, junks, sampans and a few conventional amphibious warfare craft. However, the changing doctrine and the increased activities against the ROK during the mid-1960s had led the KPA to re-establish a viable amphibious warfare capability. This was accomplished by the acquisition of conventional amphibious warfare craft and the gradual reorganisation of the few amphibious-capable units with light infantry forces into an amphibious light infantry regiment. The possibility exists that personnel for this unit were obtained by the de-activation of the GHQ-level 23rd Infantry Brigade (it was the 23rd Mechanised Artillery Brigade [alias 239th Marine Brigade and 23rd Infantry Brigade] that was responsible for the November 1951–March 1952 “island-hopping campaign” along the west coast). This amphibious light infantry regiment would gradually evolve into the present force of three amphibious light infantry brigades.

More significant, however, was the activation of the 124th Army Unit in March of 1967 to implement the new doctrine by conducting unconventional warfare operations within the ROK.⁴¹ Being tasked with infiltrating “. . . deep within the enemy’s rear to conduct reconnaissance, espionage, subversion and sabotage, and to organise local sympathisers into an irregular fighting force”, the 124th was organised into staff and training elements and an unknown number of subordinate operational units.⁴² Manpower strength was estimated at 1,000. These hand picked men were drawn from both the foot reconnaissance brigades and light infantry regiments, and were augmented by an influx of newly assigned KPA personnel. The 124th was quickly joined by another newly activated unconventional warfare formation, the 283rd Army Unit. The 283rd was believed to have been organised in a similar manner to the 124th. Any differences in the organisation, mission or operation between the two units are unknown at present.⁴³

The organisational life of the 124th Army Unit was relatively short but very dramatic. Less than a year after it was activated, a force from the 124th



124th Army Unit, 1968.

attempted the assassination of ROK President Park Chung Hee.

The Blue House raid⁴⁴

On 5 January 1968 in the city of Sariwon, a 31-man unit of the 124th Army Unit commenced specialised mission training for a mission as yet undisclosed. After eight days of specialised training the unit was transported to the 6th Base of the 124th Army Unit near Yonsan where the members were briefed on their specific mission by a Lt Gen Kim Chung Tae.⁴⁵ The mission was to assassinate ROK President Park Chung Hee at the presidential residence, the "Blue House" in Seoul. More specifically, "Your mission is to go to Seoul and cut off the head of Park Chung Hee. You are to kill any others you find in the residence . . .". It was believed that the death of President Park would result in the outbreak of civil unrest, open the way for guerrilla warfare, the intervention of the KPA and the re-unification of the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁶

On 17 January the unit was transported to Kaesong (seven miles north of the DMZ) where its members received a final briefing by the commander of the 124th Army Unit, Col Lee Jae Hyung. Following supper the unit was taken by bus to checkpoint 17 on the DMZ where they changed into ROK uniforms of the 26th Infantry Division. Over their uniforms they wore dark overalls. The unit was met by two scouts (probably from the DMZ Police) who led them through the DMZ and returned. The unit moved through the US 2nd Infantry Division sector that evening. During the daylight hours of the 18th the unit slept in an isolated wooded area. That evening the unit continued south past the 2nd Infantry Division headquarters at Camp Howze, camping on a forested mountain only a few miles from the camp. During the afternoon of the 19th, the unit was discovered accidentally by local woodcutters who were taken hostage. The woodcutters were released at 2000 hrs with a warning not to go to the police on pain of death. The unit then continued its march south to Seoul, arriving at the northern outskirts of the city at dawn on the 20th. The woodcutters, however, went straight to the ROK police, who contacted the army and initiated counter-guerrilla procedures. At 2000 hrs on the 20th, the unit removed their overalls

and proceeded in small groups to a rendezvous point one mile from the Blue House. Here, at 2200 hrs, the unit joined up and brazenly marched in column formation towards the Blue House, posing as a ROK counter-intelligence unit returning from a mission. Everything went well until they were challenged by an alerted police unit 800 metres from the Blue House. The unit attempted an orderly withdrawal, but chaos broke loose when a ROK policeman drew his pistol and the commandos began firing. During the following days members of the unit were tracked down by ROKA and police units. In a series of short, violent fire-fights, 28 KPA troops were either killed or killed themselves, two were missing and presumed dead and one was captured. (Kim Shin Jo, the one KPA soldier who was captured, was eventually pardoned for his role in the assassination plot. He now lives in Seoul, where he is married, has two children, and is a deacon of his church.) Total ROK civilian and military losses during the Blue House operation were 68 killed and 66 wounded.⁴⁷

It was just after this, on 23 January, that four KPN high-speed patrol boats, aided by two KPAF MiG aircraft, attacked, boarded and then towed from the international waters of the Sea of Japan to the DPRK port of Wonsan, the USS *Pueblo* (AGER-2).⁴⁸ The *Pueblo*, an unarmed ELINT/SIGINT ship, had left Yokosuka, Japan, for her first operational mission on 5 January 1968. The mission was to sample the electronic environment off the east coast of the DPRK and to conduct surveillance of Soviet naval units operating in the Sea of Japan and Tsushima Straits. This mission was especially critical given the failure of the Blue House raid and the possibility of either a ROK retaliation raid or an escalation of hostilities by the DPRK.

*Mission on the East Coast*⁴⁹

Eleven months later, on 30 October 1968, three or four platoon-sized units, totalling approximately 100 men, from the 124th Army Unit were landed along the eastern coast of the ROK in the areas of Samch'ok and Ulchin (areas noted for their remote and rugged terrain, and the sites of KPA amphibious landings during the Fatherland Liberation War).⁵⁰

Sometime prior to 30 October this force had been assembled at Wonsan harbour on the east coast. The unit had been trained to occupy small isolated ROK villages, revolutionise the people, establish a military intelligence network and then return north across the DMZ. Late on the afternoon of 30 October, the force embarked in motorboats and other small coastal craft and proceeded south in small groups. After midnight these units conducted a series of landings in the area from Samch'ok to Ulchin.⁵¹

During the following week the individual platoons proceeded inland into the rugged T'aebaek mountains and contacted a number of small villages. One force landed at Kopo Beach near Ulchin, moved inland and at 0610hrs on the 31st reached the village of Chuin-ri. Another group landed in four rubber boats and moved inland to the area of Sokhwai-ri. Contrary to what the raiders had been led to believe, the ROK civilians did not receive them as liberators. In fact, while not being outwardly hostile, the civilians were quite cool to DPRK propaganda efforts (involving speeches, photographs of Kim Il-sung, Kim's biography and the distribution of membership cards for the KWP) and quickly informed the ROK police and army. Within two weeks, ROK counter-guerrilla units killed most of the infiltrators. At least six members of this unit were

captured, despite their orders to kill themselves instead of being captured alive (in order to carry out these orders, each member carried either a special explosive charge or a grenade).

The Blue House and East Coast raids and the assault on the USS *Pueblo* were followed by one other significant hostile action by the DPRK against the ROK and the USA during the late 1960s. On 15 April 1969, KPAF MiG aircraft attacked and shot down a US Navy EC-121M aircraft operating out of Atsugi Naval Air Station, Japan.⁵² The EC-121M, with 31 personnel aboard, was conducting a "Beggar Shadow" (ELINT/SIGINT) mission in international airspace over the Sea of Japan when it was attacked and shot down.

There were also other smaller operations conducted by the 124th Army Unit, the foot reconnaissance brigades, and presumably the 283rd Army Unit. These generally consisted of small (usually less than 15 men) infiltrations along the east coast of the ROK, among the numerous ROK islands in the Yellow Sea off the west coast, and across the DMZ.⁵³ The objectives of these missions was both the establishment of a guerrilla warfare effort within the ROK and the acquisition of military and political intelligence.

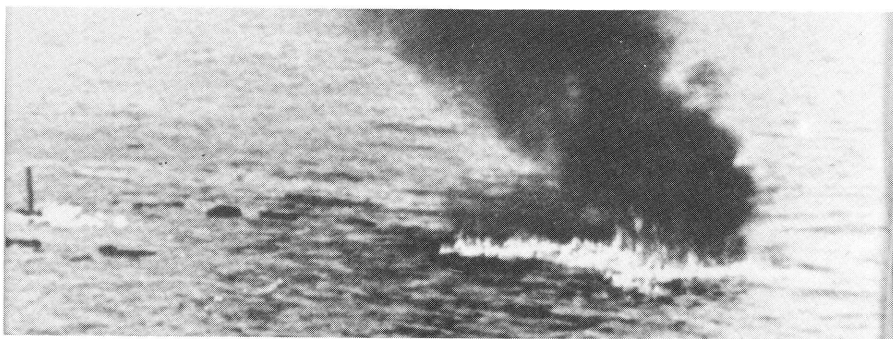
Summary

This period is notable for the dramatic increase in unconventional warfare operations against the ROK which peaked in 1968, the activation of new unconventional warfare/special operations units, and the beginnings of the DPRK's support of international revolutionary and terrorist organisations. The solidification of the internal situation within the north as embodied in the "fortress Korea" and the "four great military lines" doctrines, the desire to force ROK attention away from its "Vietnam adventure" and back to the Korean Peninsula, and the DPRK's need to present itself as a world leader in the anti-imperialist struggle, gave unconventional warfare operations a high priority.

The DPRK wrongly believed that the populace and government of the ROK were ripe for active guerrilla warfare. Although the average ROK citizen might not have been a whole-hearted supporter of his government, the majority was totally opposed to Kim Il-sung. This attitude was a result of the high level of prosperity within the ROK, memories of brutal wartime experiences, and of the animosity that had developed between rural ROK citizens and the KPA/CVA guerrilla units. The rough treatment to which members of the 124th Army Unit had subjected ROK civilians further reduced support for the intended guerrilla movement.

Ultimately, the failure of guerrilla warfare and the outcome of the operations conducted by the 124th Army Unit and other unconventional warfare units reflected a basic misunderstanding in the DPRK of conditions in the ROK.

The units and operations conducted during this period were built logically and significantly upon the base of experience established by their predecessors in the Fatherland Liberation War and late 1950s. Important developments included the expansion of existing specialised unconventional warfare units and the activation of new units, and the continued development of a wide variety of diverse capabilities (i.e. airborne, amphibious, reconnaissance, and light infantry). These units and capabilities formed the basic structure of the SPF that exists to this day.



Burning wreckage of DPRK high-speed infiltration boat sunk near Miji Island, close to Samch'onpo on the south coast of the Republic of Korea, on 21 July 1979 following a two-hour machine gun and rocket duel with an ROKN warship. Note the periscope of the embarked submersible craft, just visible on the left. (Bradley-Hahn Collection)

1968—Present: VIII Special Purpose Corps

General

As a result of the 1968 failures, the DPRK's intelligence community and the KPA were reorganised and a number of high-level persons were purged. Among those purged were the Minister of National Defence, Director of the Southern General Operations Bureau, Army Chief of Staff, and other military leaders who had stressed the modernisation of the military and who had thus given little support to unconventional warfare operations.

The intelligence community was reorganised to more clearly delineate responsibilities and to provide for co-ordination and streamlined operations. The National Intelligence Committee, chaired by Kim Il-sung, remained the overall co-ordinating agency for all intelligence, unconventional warfare, and operations. The Cabinet Intelligence Committee appears to have relinquished its agent-handling responsibilities, now being responsible primarily for the collation of information gathered by other intelligence agencies and the dissemination of finished intelligence products to these agencies. The Public Security Bureau and the KWP Liaison Department were made responsible for positive intelligence operations within the political sphere.⁵⁴ The former organisation was also responsible for counter-espionage and other internal security responsibilities. The Reconnaissance Bureau, primarily through a newly created VIII Special Purpose Corps, was made responsible for positive intelligence operations within the military sphere and special operations. All agencies would co-ordinate their activities, and would provide assistance where required.

At the Fourth Session of the People's Army Party Committee, Kim Il-sung emphasised the "study of combining regular and irregular warfare, and of mountain warfare". He indicated that there would be a unique strategic approach based on the "light infantry units" which had the capability of conducting all forms of combat. This was a pivotal point in the development of the KPA's special purpose forces. For, up to this time, the primary mission of these units had been unconventional warfare within which guerrilla warfare was stressed above almost all other aspects. Now, however, this was to change. These units would now be responsible for unconventional warfare and special

operations with guerrilla warfare no longer being emphasised to the detriment of other capabilities. This change in doctrine resulted in a dramatic reorganisation being initiated within the unconventional warfare units. The most significant of these changes included:

- Activation of VIII Special Purpose Corps.
- Reorganisation of the light infantry regiments into brigades.
- De-activation of the 124th and 283rd Army Units.
- De-activation of the 17th Reconnaissance Brigade.
- De-activation of the several light infantry regiments and the concurrent activation of divisional-level light infantry battalions.
- De-activation of the Foot Reconnaissance Centres.
- Re-organisation of the Foot Reconnaissance Brigades.

VIII Special Purpose Corps

In the aftermath of the disastrous 1968 failures, the 124th Army Unit was disbanded. Shortly afterwards, during early 1969, VIII Special Purpose Corps was activated in its place. This new unit was built around a cadre drawn from the 124th Army Unit and augmented by elements from the 283rd Army Unit and an unidentified light infantry brigade (possibly the 17th Airborne [Reconnaissance] Brigade).⁵⁵ VIII Special Purpose Corps was, and still is, the primary headquarters tasked with the overall responsibility for unconventional warfare and special operations (including positive military intelligence) within the KPA. Responsibility for positive non-military intelligence operations was consolidated within the KWP Liaison Department and the Public Security Department. The light infantry regiments, under the control of the "forward area group" corps, were enlarged to brigades.

Following shortly after its activation, VIII Special Purpose Corps received a number of newly expanded light infantry brigades. Other light infantry regiments were either subordinated to the "forward area group" corps headquarters or disbanded and their battalions subordinated to the infantry divisions within these corps. The "rear area" corps also began to receive light

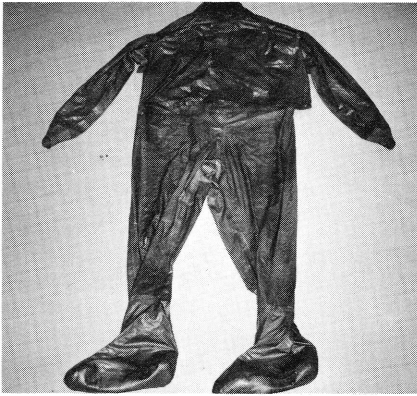
Equipment captured from a three-man DPRK infiltration team in the Ake-Imjin River area between 29 June and 5 July 1981. (All United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission)



Weapons, ammunition, photographic and communications equipment, and clothing.



Combat swimmer gear.



Frogman's suit.



Weapons, ammunition, navigation equipment and codebooks.



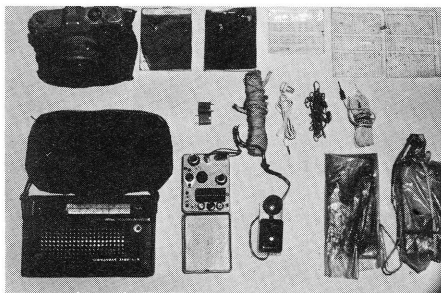
Close-up of codebooks.



ROK military cap bearing a captain's insignia.



ROK money and female disguise comprising hairpiece and clothing.



Codebooks and photographic and communications equipment.

infantry units but at a much reduced level, with each "rear area" corps receiving a light infantry battalion, and subordinate divisions a light infantry company. The Foot Reconnaissance Centres were also suspended at this time and their personnel assigned to VIII Special Purpose Corps or the reconnaissance brigades. Four of the reconnaissance brigades were reorganised and subordinated to VIII Special Purpose Corps. The remaining reconnaissance brigades were deactivated to act as cadre or "fillers" for new special purpose units. The size of the SPF in 1970 was estimated to be 15,000.⁵⁶

These organisational changes were accompanied by a change in doctrine which went from a guerrilla-style unconventional warfare to a more balanced concept of unconventional warfare, with strong emphasis being placed upon rapid infiltration and disruption of enemy rear areas through concealed movement—"lighter arms and faster foot pace".⁵⁷ More significantly, however, was the inclusion of special operations within this new doctrine. This change in doctrine saw VIII Special Purpose Corps and its subordinate units begin the metamorphosis into special-operations-capable units (especially the reconnaissance brigades). These capabilities would eventually develop along lines similar to those of current Soviet Spetsnaz units.

The failure of guerrilla warfare brought about the realisation of the need to further develop the KPA doctrines of "combined operations" and "two front war". The new doctrine was based upon the combination of regular and special operations forces. During the Fifth Party Congress, in November 1970, Kim Il-sung spoke of this revised doctrine.

"Our country has many mountains and rivers, and has long seacoasts. In the terrain of a country such as ours, if one takes good advantage of this kind of terrain, carrying out mountain and night combat with skill, and correctly applying combinations of large scale warfare and small scale warfare, regular and irregular combat, even in the case on an enemy who is armed to the fingertips with the latest military technology, we can do a good job of annihilating him. The special experiences of the Struggle for National Liberation in our country bear this out and in the same manner the Vietnam war of today also bears this out."⁵⁸

By 1971, the 283rd Army Unit, the 17th Reconnaissance Brigade and the Foot Reconnaissance Stations were also disbanded and their personnel were reassigned to augment existing units organic to VIII Special Purpose Corps. At the same time an unknown number of light infantry regiments were deactivated and reorganised into battalions which were subordinated to the "forward" infantry divisions.

Prompted by the increasing effectiveness of the ROK defences along the DMZ and the partial US military withdrawal from the ROK, the early 1970s saw the further growth of KPA amphibious and airborne forces. Amphibious capabilities remained minimal as the KPN only possessed approximately 20 amphibious warfare craft (5 LCU and 15 LCM).⁵⁹ Similarly, airborne capabilities were limited by the number of KPAF transport aircraft (100) and helicopters (33).⁶⁰ This period also witnessed the continuing deployment of small teams of SPF personnel to international revolutionary and terrorist groups, and third world countries to assist in military training.

Doctrinal changes continued. In 1972, the revised doctrines of "combined operations" and "two front war" were further elaborated:

“Our great leader has invented an exceptionally excellent policy enabling North Korean forces to smash the enemy strategically and tactically by either integrating or combining the following: large unit and small unit operations; the experiences of the guerrilla units and modern military technology; guerrilla and modern war tactics; strong guerrilla activities and national popular resistance.

“The close integration of both the large and small operations is fully compatible with the tactical principles of the guerrilla units which hit and destroy the enemy by employing concentration, dispersion, and swift mobility. This combination is a wise strategic and tactical policy which enables guerrilla units to hold the initiative constantly in their hands until the enemy is crushed.

“This combination of guerrilla tactics and modern warfare tactics, and the integration of guerrilla activities and people’s resistance is intended to mobilise the whole nation, organise all the people into combat forces reinforcing the main standing regular forces, and have them strike and annihilate the enemy everywhere.

“This is an excellent strategic and tactical policy which will make it possible to completely liberate the whole fatherland.”⁶¹

During 1973 the Political Security Department is believed to have assumed the majority of the internal and political security responsibilities (including counter-espionage) formerly under the jurisdiction of the Security Bureau of the Ministry of Public Security (formerly the Ministry of Internal Affairs).⁶² The Public Security Department also assumed responsibility for the majority of the assistance to the SPF which the Security Bureau had provided.

The number of special purpose units had increased to 20 regiments/brigades by 1975.⁶³ During the mid- to late 1970s the light infantry units within the “rear area” corps had expanded considerably. The “rear area” corps now had an attached light infantry brigade or several airborne light infantry battalions. Their subordinate divisions possessed an organic light infantry battalion or company. The “forward” corps also received additional light infantry assets, each now having an attached reconnaissance brigade and one or two light infantry regiments/brigades. The GHQ-level shock brigades also received a light infantry battalion, in keeping with their expanded role of DMZ assault. The DIA estimates that in 1978 the personnel strength of the SPF was 41,000.⁶⁴

By 1982 the personnel strength had risen to approximately 81,000.⁶⁵ The light infantry units within the “rear area” corps had now reached their current level, with an attached light infantry brigade or airborne light infantry brigade at corps level, and an organic light infantry battalion at divisional level. Within the “forward” corps the deployment of SPF units reached its current level with all light infantry units being expanded to brigade size.

Sometime during 1984 the KPA initiated a major reorganisation and redeployment programme. The major points of this programme were apparently the forward deployment of a number of GHQ and second-echelon assets and the reorganisation of a number of infantry/motorised infantry divisions as brigades (thus making them similar to the combined-arms brigades).⁶⁶ This was accomplished by splitting a division in half, to become two brigades, with the excess units being reorganised at corps level. The effect of this reorgani-

sation upon the SPF units is presently unknown.

During 1983-85 the DPRK was able to acquire covertly approximately 87 Hughes MD 500D/E helicopters (see Chapter 8). These civilian versions of the 500MD Defender antitank helicopters (used in large numbers by the ROKAF) have been armed and painted in ROKAF colors by the KPAF. Thus configured, these helicopters would prove extremely useful to the KPA in any renewed conflict. This is especially true in the areas of special operations and airbase assault. SPF units are actively training with these helicopters and have sometimes conducted this training near the DMZ with occasional penetrations of ROK airspace.⁶⁷

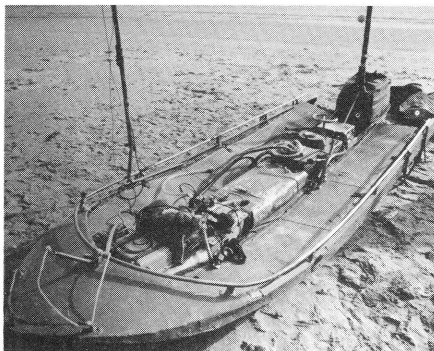
Summary

The process of developing a unique unconventional warfare/special operations capability, which had its roots in the pre-war KPA, had continued with the activation of the 124th Army Unit and the "Infantry Reconnaissance Centres" followed by their reorganisation into "light infantry units" and their subsequent expansion into multi-faceted brigade-size units and was culminated during this period by the establishment of VIII Special Purpose Corps and the adoption of the "combined operations" and "two front war" doctrines.

Since the early 1980s it appears that the activation of new SPF brigades has ceased, although there have been some overall force adjustments which have resulted in the expansion of some brigades and qualification of units as airborne or airmobile. Details of these changes remain uncertain. Most changes are probably within the areas of equipment (i.e. the acquisition of MD 500D/E helicopters) and staffing of units for specific wartime missions.

The ever increasing commitment of SPF personnel in support of third world nations and international revolutionary and terrorist groups continued during this period. The DPRK's efforts in this area appear to be second only to those of the Soviet Union and Cuba. In July 1985 President Reagan denounced the DPRK as one of five "Outlaw States" involved in world terrorism.

Equipment captured on the beach at Mijo-ri, ROK, on 1 December 1980. (All United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission)



DPRK high-speed infiltration craft.



Stern view of infiltration craft, showing propulsion unit.



Weapons captured at Mijo-ri.



Combat swimmer gear.



Communications equipment.



The DPRK agent who came ashore at Mijo-ri carried narcotics and foreign exchange.



Special weapons, ammunition, detonators and knives.

Notes

- 1 Kim Il-sung. *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 65.
- 2 Han Sung-joo, pp. 149–150.
- 3 There were approximately four major Bans at this time: Kaspen—Kim Il-sung and his partisans; “Korean-Soviet”—led by Ho Ka-ui and An-Kil, consisting of approximately 3,000 Korean returnees from Russia; Yen-an Ban—led by Kim Du Bong and Kim Mu Chong, and consisting of the Korean Volunteer Army; and “Domestic”—led by Pang Ho-san, Kim Kang and Kim Ho, and consisting of several thousand independent partisan fighters from both Manchuria and north China. Chung Kiwon. “The North Korean People’s Army and the Party”, in *North Korea Today*, Edited by Robert A. Scalapino, Frederick A. Praeger, 1963, p. 108; and McCune, Evelyn Becker. *Leadership in North Korea: Groupings and Motivation*, pp. 9–14.
- 4 US Army, “History of the North Korean Army”, HQ, FEC, MIS, G2, 31 July 1952, pp. 90–91.
- 5 McCune, p. 9.
- 6 McCune, p. 34. Other sources differ as to the number of followers that returned with Kim Il-sung. Some estimates are as low as 50.
- 7 “History of the North Korean Army”, pp. 6–7.
- 8 Kim Mu Chong was the only one of 30 Koreans who set out with Mao Zedong on the “Long March” to survive. He was rated as one of the best artillerymen in the Chinese Communist Army and an ardent follower of Mao Zedong. “History of the North Korean Army”, p. 98.
- 9 One of the best studies on this subject is: Griffith, Brigadier General Samuel B. USMC (Ret.), *Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978.
- 10 Ibid. pp. 27–28.
- 11 This doctrine is succinctly set forth in a July 1940 Soviet document issued by the Soviet North-West Front HQ entitled “Instructions Concerning the Organisation and Activity of Partisan Detachments and Diversionist Groups”, as cited in: Cooper, Matthew. *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans: 1941–1944*, Stein & Day 1979, pp. 187–188.
- 12 US Army. “Enemy Tactics”, HQ EUSAK, date?, pp. 112–127.
- 13 The Guerrilla Guidance Section was also known as the Guerrilla Guidance Bureau or People’s Guerrilla Command during the war.
- 14 Several sources also identify a third unit, the Zennan Unit. However, given the time and locations of the unit’s operations it is more likely that it was the 5th Infantry Division’s Guerrilla Group, which consisted of two battalions of 600 men each. See US Army, FEC, “ATIS Research Supplement, 3,” 15 November 1950, pp. 18–20.
- 15 Ibid and *History of the North Korean Army*, pp. 80–83.
- 16 Field Jr., James A. *History of United States Naval Operations: Korea*, GPO, 1962, p. 51.
- 17 Although, most sources indicate that the 945th landed in the wrong sector and proved ineffective, this may be incorrect. The 945th may, in fact, have been the unit assigned to the Pusan landing. If this is correct, then the 945th proved “ineffective” because it was destroyed.
- 18 US Army, FEC, “ATIS Research Supplement, 104”, 1951, p. 25.
- 19 The ROK National Police was organised in 1945 but did not expand until the outbreak of hostilities. By August 1951 it consisted of 63,000 men, as compared to 40,000 in 1945. The National Police, besides guarding fixed installations and conducting anti-guerrilla activities, was also tasked with railway security. Several thousand National Police were attached to US Corps to control civilian population, screen indigenous personnel and conduct counter-intelligence missions.
- 20 “Enemy Tactics”, p. 126.
- 21 US Army, *Order-of-Battle Handbook: Chinese Communist Forces, Korea and The North Korean Army*, HQ, FEC & EUSA, ACS-G2. 1 January 1956, maps 3 & 4.
- 22 “North Korean Armed Forces”, p. 35. This source should be compared with *History of United States Naval Operations: Korea*, pp. 416–429.
- 23 Chung Kiwon, pp. 121–122.
- 24 It is important to note that this demobilisation was not only for economic reasons. Kim Il-sung used it to separate a number of his rivals from their power bases within the KPA. McCune, pp. 7–8.
- 25 Ibid. p. 11; and “North Korean Armed Forces”, p. 34. Both the Cabinet Intelligence Committee and the National Intelligence Committee have also been identified as “Bureaux”.

- 26 "North Korean Armed Forces", p. 7.
- 27 Ibid., p. 44.
- 28 The Foot Reconnaissance Centres were also known as Foot Reconnaissance Stations/Bases or Infantry Reconnaissance Centres.
- 29 "North Korean Armed Forces", p. 45.
- 30 Han Sung-joo, p. 150.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid., p. 153.
- 33 Manabu, Aota. *Kim II Sung's Army: The Full Story of the North Korean People's Army*. Contemporary Affairs Series No. 286, Nyumon Shinsho, Kyoikusha, Tokyo, 1979, p. 42.
- 34 The primary ROKA formations sent to the Republic of Vietnam included: the ROK "Capital Division", which arrived on 29 September 1965 and departed on 10 March 1973; the 9th Infantry Division arrived on 27 September 1966 and departed on 16 March 1973; and the 2nd Marine Brigade arrived 19 October 1965 and departed in February 1972. Stanton, Shelby L. *Vietnam Order Of Battle*, US News Books, 1981, pp. 272-273.
- 35 Han Sung-joo, pp. 155-156.
- 36 As quoted in: Manabu, p. 42.
- 37 Defence Intelligence Agency. "Korean DMZ: The Challenge of Making it Work", *Defence Intelligence Digest*, July 1969, pp. 12-14.
- 38 "Special Report—The Search for Peace: A Year End Assessment, 1985", Association of the United States Army, pp. 39-40.
- 39 KPAF military transport capability at this time was consolidated into one transport/utility unit which was directly subordinate to KPAF Command HQ. Its estimated strength was 26 aircraft including: six An-2 Colt and eight Li-2 Cab transports; and 12 Mi-4 Hound helicopters. This small number of transport aircraft severely limited any true airborne capabilities. Department of Defence. "Military Assistance Reappraisal: FY 1967-71", Volume 1, TOP SECRET/NORFORN, June 1965, pp. IV-17-18, and Annex 12 pp. 4-7.
- 40 Manabu, p. 64.
- 41 Both the 124th and the 283rd are frequently identified as "Guerrilla Unit", "Independent Unit" or simply "Unit".
- 42 Defence Intelligence Agency. "North Korean Armed Forces Modernisation", *Defence Intelligence Digest*, December 1968, p. 15.
- 43 It is possible that both these units were subordinated to the Public Security Department.
- 44 Hubbell, John G. and Reed, David. "Mission: To Murder A President", *Reader's Digest*, July 1968, pp. 142-147.
- 45 Lt Gen Kim Chung Tae was believed to have been intelligence chief of the Public Security Department.
- 46 Choi Young. "The North Korean Military Buildup and Its Impact on North Korean Military Strategy in the 1980s", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXV, No. 3, March 1985, p. 345.
- 47 This was not the last time that DPRK special purpose forces attempted to assassinate President Park Chung Hee. Another attempt was made during 1974 which resulted in the death of his wife. In August 1982, police in Canada uncovered a plot to assassinate him during a visit to that country. Wallace, James N. "New Tensions In Korea—New Risks for US", *US News & World Report*, 24 October 1983, p. 32.
- 48 The rusting hull of the USS *Pueblo* is still anchored in the port of Wonsan, where it serves as a tourist attraction.
- 49 Krisher, Bernard. "A Soldier's Story", *Newsweek*, 30 December 1968, pp. 33-34; Manabu, pp. 43-44; and "Brief History of North Korean Provocations Against South Korea: 1945-1977", North Korean Affairs Institute, October 1977.
- 50 Defence Intelligence Agency. "North Korean Infiltration Raises Specter of Insurgency", *Defence Intelligence Digest*, January 1968, p. 6. This force has also been described as a company.
- 51 Sources disagree as to the total number of infiltrators, and the number and times of the landings. Most estimates as to the total size of the force are around 100. The size of each landing party ranges from 15 to 30 men. There are some indications that the landings took place over the course of several days.
- 52 East, Captain Don C. "A History of US Navy Fleet Air Reconnaissance: Part I, The Pacific and VQ-1", *The Hook*, Spring 1987, p. 30.
- 53 An indication of the intensity of these operations was that during 1967 there were 31

known covert amphibious landings with 86 persons successfully reaching ROK shores. During 1968 there were 152 persons successfully landed in only 12 landing operations. Hahn, Bradley. "North Korean Navy: Strong and Getting Bolder", *Proceedings*, July 1982, Vol. 108/7/953, p. 113.

54 The KWP Liaison Department, is now sometimes identified as a "Bureau".

55 Manabu, p. 64.

56 "Why Korea is Scared", p. 4.

57 Choi Young, p. 345.

58 As quoted in: Manabu p. 43.

59 The KPN also began the indigenous production of the Namp'o class LCPF during this period.

60 *Air International*. "Korea (North)", October 1985, p. 163.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

62 *North Korea: A Country Study*, p. 212. This organisation is also known as the Public Safety Bureau of the Ministry of Public Safety.

63 "Special Report—The Search for Peace: A Year End Assessment, 1985", pp. 39-40.

64 "North Korean Special Purpose Forces", p. 2.

65 *Ibid.*

66 The reasons for this reorganisation are uncertain. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the KPA was not satisfied with its mechanisation programme. One of the primary reasons for this dissatisfaction was the inability of the divisional level staffs to handle adequately the increased responsibilities of mechanised operations.

67 Anderson, Jack. "N. Korea penetrates S. Korean airspace with US choppers", *Newsday*, 29 April 1985, p. 54.

Chapter Three

Special units and tactics 1950-53

"The KPA's experiences during the Fatherland Liberation War have provided the base upon which they have developed their tactics and doctrine."-ROKA officer

General

The Fatherland Liberation War saw the employment by both the KPA and the CVA of a significant number and variety of specialised units and tactics including reconnaissance, delaying, assault and isolating units, envelopment forces, bayonet companies and penetration units, and more. Present day SPF units and tactics represent a synthesis and logical development of these war-time assets.

Reconnaissance units¹

Reconnaissance units of the KPA were organised within the structure of every echelon from corps to company levels. The KPA corps and divisions had a reconnaissance battalion, the regiment had a reconnaissance company, the battalion would task a platoon and the company would task a squad. All such units were attached to the headquarters of each echelon and were actively employed by their respective commanders.

The three most common missions performed by KPA reconnaissance units were:

Political reconnaissance. To determine political trends and thoughts, and the caste system of the villagers in the area of the proposed attack. The local KWP cell and its sympathisers were contacted and the political tendencies of the area were analysed. The members of the reconnaissance units would usually be KWP members. The members were thoroughly briefed with the communist doctrine before each mission so that they were capable of indoctrinating local citizens and gaining their support. Political officers usually led political reconnaissance groups.

Intelligence reconnaissance. To capture UNC personnel and classified documents, and to collect order-of-battle information. This mission was accomplished by infiltrating enemy positions, using local KWP members and sympathisers as scouts. In combat local citizens (classified as low level experience or tactical information agents) were used because of their knowledge of surrounding terrain and language. Both political and military officers led these missions.

Armed reconnaissance. To determine hostile firing positions. Weapons were fired indiscriminately in the direction of suspected UNC positions and return fire was carefully noted. This type of mission was led by military officers.

In addition to these reconnaissance units and missions, KPA divisional-level engineer battalions were habitually employed to conduct engineer reconnaissance.

Engineer reconnaissance. To secure information of engineer interest: the locations, nature and extent of hostile obstacles and mine fields; the existence of signal devices and booby traps and feasible methods of breaching such obstacles; the type and nature of hostile weapons emplacements; potential routes of attack; conditions of roads; location of river crossing sites; water points and their location; and similar data of engineer importance. Elements of the divisional-level combat engineer battalion were routinely attached to subordinate regiments, and functioned under the control of the regimental commanders within the general limits of the division field order.

When a commander was assigned an objective he tasked his respective reconnaissance unit to determine the political trends of the civilians in the area and any hostile positions. Before the mission, the reconnaissance unit was given a map orientation on terrain features in the objective area, and every member familiarised himself with the conditions of approach. A rigid physical inspection was made of each unit member to reject anybody who might hinder the assignment. Each member was issued with rations for a few days depending upon the length of the mission. Personnel on patrol were taught simple English, or Korean, phrases to use to deceive UNC guards. Before leaving on the mission, a last minute indoctrination talk was given by the political officer, and each group was made to repeat its mission and general orders.

During movement the most advanced echelon was the patrol which consisted of three to seven soldiers led by a squad leader. The patrol was positioned approximately 300 metres ahead of the squad which in turn was approximately 600 metres ahead of the platoon. Some advance units had a supporting group, to cover the advance of the reconnaissance patrol, and an obstacle clearing group, to remove any obstructions encountered such as barbed wire and mines.

An intelligence patrol consisted of a confiscation team and a raider team. The confiscation team had the mission of capturing UNC documents or obtaining order-of-battle information by infiltrating UNC lines. The raider team had the mission of protecting the confiscation group within UNC lines.

Passwords used among members of the reconnaissance units were normally names of trees, rivers, towns, areas, etc., depending on the unit to which it was attached. Within small patrols, each member was numbered according to the rank held by him in the patrol. Passwords were also used among local citizens who acted as temporary or low-level agents. Often small patrols held the family of a temporary informant as hostage until his mission was completed. Upon detection by hostile forces, members of a reconnaissance unit would discard all weapons and act as refugees.

KPA engineer reconnaissance patrols normally operated at night and pene-

trated up to 10km into hostile territory, or to a distance that permitted return to the assembly point within eight hours after departure. During the reconnaissance, KPA engineers performed simple road and bridge repairs along future routes of advance but more extensive repairs were left to regular pioneer teams of the divisional engineer battalion.

In addition, KPA engineers were also called upon to conduct special reconnaissance operations having limited and special objectives. Road reconnaissance, bridge reconnaissance for a stream crossing point, and reconnaissance of hostile obstacles all fell into this category.

When reconnoitring a road prior to an advance, engineer patrols determined the road's load capacity, the condition of the road and any necessary repairs, whether suitable repair materials were available, the location of roadblocks and mines and how they could be bypassed. Bridges and possible fords were reconnoitred, and the availability of materials to repair a bridge or to construct a ferry was noted. Upon completion of the mission, a reconnaissance sketch was submitted to the divisional engineer officers.

Delaying units²

The mission of the delaying unit was to cover a withdrawal by diverting a possible UNC attack. This was accomplished by increasing their volume of fire on UNC positions. A delaying party was usually selected from the last unit to break contact with UNC forces. These units were deployed at strategic points where the terrain was the least favourable for attack, the roads were poor and natural approaches few. Thus, a small number of men armed with automatic weapons were able to hinder an attack.

The covering forces ranged in size from three-man groups to a platoon, although a squad was normally employed. The variation in size of the group depended upon the size of the withdrawing unit and the pressure being exerted by UNC forces. A platoon usually covered the withdrawal of a battalion. Radios were not used to control the delaying actions.

A marked change took place in the delaying action of CVA covering forces after their May 1951 offensive. In their withdrawal tactics the Chinese usually moved out after dark, leaving no delaying parties. Close contact with UNC forces was avoided. A significant departure from this was noted when CVA units began to defend tenaciously, even to the death. Such a covering force was forbidden to withdraw until ordered to do so by higher authority; rarely was such an order issued.

Assault units³

Two types of assault unit were organised by KPA forces. The first assisted the assaulting troops by removing obstacles in their approach and securing strong points. It also had the mission of destroying artillery positions. The second type was assigned to a unit to destroy command posts, signals centres, military warehouses and airfields, and to penetrate deeply into UNC territory.

KPA divisions organised assault units comprising engineers, infantry and supporting arms. These units had four elements: an obstacle clearing team

consisting of an engineer squad which cleared and marked paths through hostile obstacles; a demolition team consisting of an engineer squad with two flame throwers for neutralising pill-boxes; a capturing team comprising a rifle platoon which attacked UNC infantry in an effort to isolate strong points and prevent reinforcements; and a firing team which supported the rest of the assaulting forces with a base of fire.

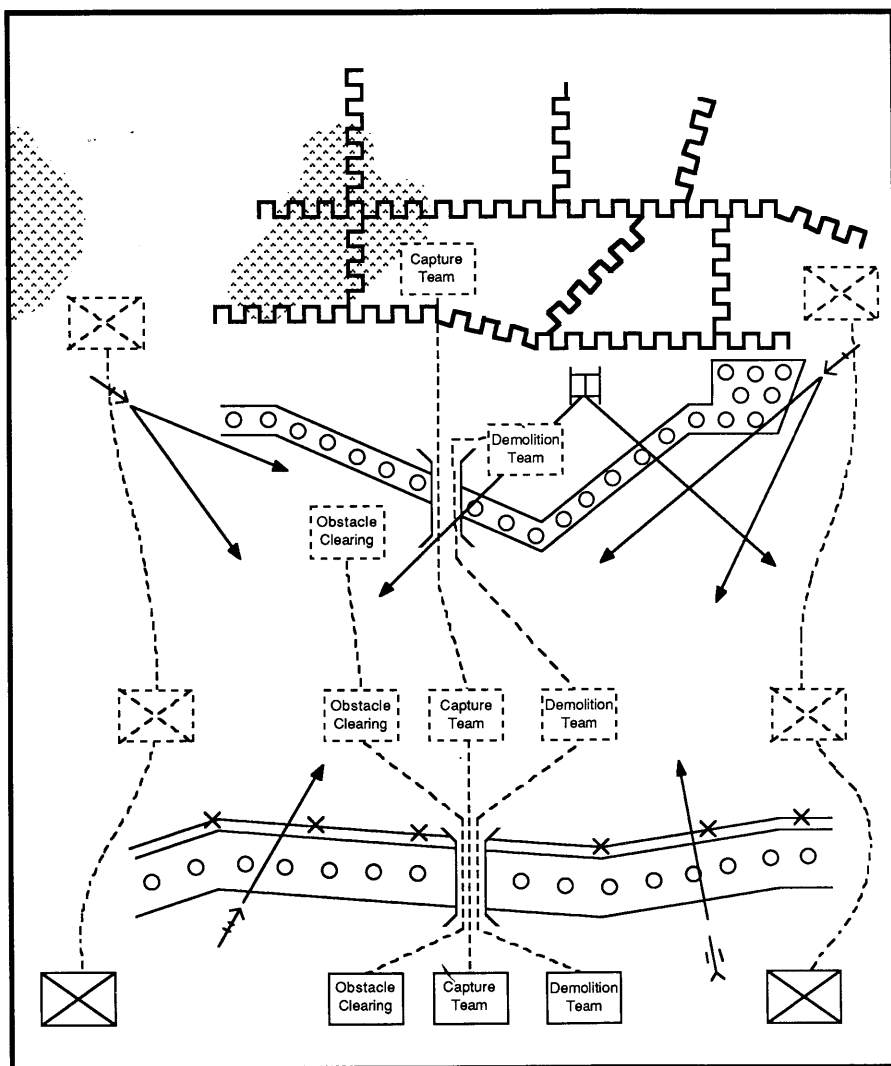
Under cover of supporting machine gun fire, the obstacle clearing team would mark a path through mine-fields and obstacles. When it had completed its mission, it signalled the demolition team which would advance by leaps and bounds using any available cover. On reaching the objective, the team would attack fortified positions with grenades, demolition charges and flame throwers. The capturing team advanced with the demolition team destroying UNC weapons emplacements and isolating the objective from its supporting infantry. It also supported by fire the assault force and prepared for any UNC counterattack. During the whole operation, the firing team would support the demolition and capturing teams by directing its fire at hostile fortifications and weapon emplacements as required. The assault unit could also be supported by infantry units attacking positions on the flanks of the objective.

Below divisional level the commanding officer of a forward echelon regiment would organise two or three platoon-sized assault teams in each battalion. One or two were also organised as a reserve and attached directly to the regiment to secure its advance. An assault team consisted of HQ and five or six sub-teams:

- HQ consisting of a team leader, messenger and medical aide.
- Assault sub-team consisting of one infantry squad with two engineers attached.
- Security sub-team consisting of four engineers with wire cutters and one heavy machine gun squad.
- Mortar sub-team with two 60mm mortars.
- Anti-tank sub-team of one anti-tank squad.
- Reserve sub-team which operated with the security sub-team until assigned as an assault sub-team.
- Political sub-team consisting of one to three KWP members (not always employed).

Each assault team had two deputy commanders; the political sub-team leader, security sub-team leader or reserve sub-team leader was appointed the first deputy. The entire assault team consisted of approximately 50 men and was commanded by either a platoon or company commander. Each member of the assault unit carried one day's cooked rice and one day's raw food. Light dress was generally worn and sometimes uniforms similar to UNC were worn. The assault team which penetrated UNC lines would be equipped with enough firepower to withstand counterattack.

The assault team usually infiltrated UNC lines one by one and re-assembled at a designated spot. If larger groups were used and hostile fire was received, the assault team sent a small group to engage and destroy the UNC position while the main body changed direction. The team rarely passed through a populated area but if there was no other way it divided into small groups to avoid attracting attention. Often native guides were employed. The penetrating assault team co-operated closely with local guerrilla leaders, obtaining from them supplies and equipment.



Assault unit tactics.

When an objective was to be taken, the assault team would attack frontally under the covering fire of the mortar and security teams. If UNC forces discovered the attack, the assault sub-team would approach on the run. In the meanwhile, the reserve assault sub-team attempted to envelop the resistance and strike the flank or rear. If the objective of an attack was a HQ, fire was distributed among the tents or buildings, communication centres and the various weapon emplacements. At a pre-arranged signal all fired at once. In order to ensure fire on various weapon emplacements, covering fire was divided into several small groups—each being assigned a specific target. If the buildings or tents were entered, the men were divided into groups with one man acting as lookout at each entrance. The buildings or tents were entered at the same time.

All actions were swift and the assault teams withdrew quickly. If heavy resistance was encountered, the assault teams withdrew to pre-arranged assembly points.

Isolating units⁴

During a KPA or CVA attack certain units, of various sizes depending upon the situation, were designated as "isolating" units. These were designated before the attack and usually accompanied the "envelopment" force. An isolating unit was tasked with two missions:

- To attack reinforcements.
- To destroy retreating isolated UNC units.

When the isolating unit arrived at its destination, it divided into two groups. Each one dealt with a specific mission. Defensive positions were built in depth in rugged areas which provided good coverage of escape routes and good camouflage. Reinforced shelters were built and all excavation spoil removed. Two different positions were constructed: one to prevent UNC reinforcements and the other to deal with remnants of UNC troops trying to break out of the encirclement. The two positions were constructed close enough to provide easy control, yet wide enough apart to afford manoeuvrability. A portion of the isolating unit was held in reserve, and anti-tank positions were set up at ambush sites and locations where tanks might appear. All neighbouring terrain features which dominated the position were seized to guarantee the security of the position and prevent the withdrawal of UNC troops.

When UNC forces counterattacked to relieve surrounded troops, a small unit with reinforced firepower remained in position and engaged the assaulting troops. The main force deployed to the flanks and took cover. When UNC forces drew close enough, the KPA counterattacked both flanks and the rear of the approaching troops.

Envelopment forces⁵

More than any other tactic, that of envelopment and double envelopment characterised the attacks by the KPA and CVA in the Fatherland Liberation War. It was employed at all levels as is evident from the tactics used and from captured documents.

Surrounding tactics are a great threat to the enemy [UNC] and it is easy to succeed with such measures. The enemy has no great strength, their morale is low and their fighting ability is not good. Not only is their rear unguarded and a strict watch not kept but the enemy is careless of its guard to the front. Thus we can easily succeed in breaking through their lines and going around them.⁶

The fundamental tactical doctrine of both KPA and CVA combat echelons was that of the double envelopment, or attacking a weak point from two directions. One unit would attack the front as two others hit the rear from different directions.

To facilitate these envelopment operations both the KPA and CVA employed

an "envelopment force". The mission of this force was threefold:

- To arrive undetected at a given location as quickly as possible.
- To attack the UNC lines of retreat.
- To blockade the line of retreat.

To penetrate UNC lines the enveloping force would generally select a site approximately 5km from the point where the frontal assault would occur. This was to avoid any possible detection and cross fire. The depth of the flanking penetrations and the distance between penetrations varied, depending upon the situation, terrain and mission. All units moved as quickly as possible to avoid detection.

If any resistance was encountered while thrusting towards the rear of UNC lines, a small force was used to engage or disperse it while the main body continued towards its objective. Other small groups such as "isolating" units, "assault" units and "bayonet companies", were given the mission of attacking UNC command posts and artillery positions. Encirclements were accomplished in great depth behind UNC lines.

Once behind the lines an envelopment force would establish road blocks to cut off retreating forces. The road block was usually started by ambushing the lead vehicle of a convoy and disabling it. Any vehicle that then attempted to pass by was also disabled. This process was continued until the road was completely blocked with disabled vehicles. Both machine-gun fire and mortar fire were used extensively in road blocks as well as the normal small arms and automatic weapons fire. During the UNC withdrawal north of Hoengsong in February 1951, the CVA lighted fires near the road at night to silhouette the vehicles as they passed. When UNC troops passed the fire, they were subjected to intense automatic weapons and mortar fire.

Bayonet companies and penetration units⁷

CVA forces employed bayonet companies (*Chien Tao Lien*) and penetration units as assault units. Bayonet companies were used to assault and breach UNC positions. The first platoon had the mission of clearing the path for the remainder of the company. One squad, equipped with four PPSH submachine guns, 56 grenades and seven rifles, acted as a spearhead. Two squads equipped with bangalore torpedoes, RPG-3 grenades and rifles acted as demolition squads, with the aim of demolishing the threefold UNC defensive fortifications—barbed wire, mines and roadblocks. One squad, equipped with two light machine guns, in co-ordination with a 60mm mortar squad, covered the spearhead and demolition squads with fire.

The second platoon acted as the assault platoon and took action when the first platoon had completed its mission. The third platoon acted as the support platoon and reinforced the second platoon. If the bayonet company encountered heavy hostile fire, 82mm mortars and heavy machine guns from the regiment's heavy weapons company were used for support.

Bayonet companies had the joint mission of both removing obstacles in front of the second wave of troops and seizing UNC command posts and artillery positions. Each regiment had one or two of these companies.

Penetration units were organised within individual infantry companies. Their mission was, like that of the bayonet companies and KPA assault units,

that of clearing mines and obstacles hindering the advance of attacking infantry.

The penetration unit was composed of an assault team, a demolition team and a support team. The assault team was equipped with two 60mm mortars, two or three light machine guns, a heavy machine gun and three or four submachine guns. The demolition team included demolition squads and anti-tank teams equipped with at least 15 bangalore torpedoes and "Molotov cocktails". It cleared wire entanglements, abatis and mines, and destroyed UNC tanks. A support team of six to eight men carried ammunition for the other two teams. The company commander led the penetration unit.

Infiltration

Infiltration tactics were employed by the KPA for both espionage and military operations. Early in the Fatherland Liberation War, KPA troops mingled with refugees fleeing southward because of the reluctance of UNC pilots to strafe columns of civilians. In other instances, groups of men, women and children walked into UNC positions with KPA soldiers interspersed among the lead elements. As the groups were screened, other soldiers would launch an attack.

It was not only small groups that succeeded in infiltrating UNC lines. Early in December 1950, the KPA's 10th Infantry Division moved south through the mountainous countryside from the 38th Parallel to within 20 miles of Taegu. It was a remarkable military achievement. It had to rely on the countryside for food and clothing and on captured stocks for ammunition. Lacking medical facilities, it was forced to operate on a survival-of-the-fittest basis. Operating as a guerrilla force, the division was able to keep the 1st Marine Division (as well as ROK security forces) occupied in the mountains northeast of Taegu. After the 1st Marine Division was withdrawn and committed to combat elsewhere in February 1951, the division became the full time concern of the ROK 2nd Infantry Division. Despite heavy losses from constant attacks it maintained the form of a military unit. Approximately one third of the 10th Infantry Division managed to withdraw northward to its own lines by breaking into smaller units.

Because of the effectiveness of UNC air power, the KPA changed its tactics and adopted an operation called *Paktisa*. Groups of KPA soldiers, dressed as civilians and carrying concealed weapons, infiltrated UNC lines at night and attacked from the flanks and rear. Others established roadblocks to cut off withdrawing UNC units. Both the Chinese and KPA practised the same ruse of having soldiers dressed in civilian clothes and mingling with refugees. These men hid in caves and buildings during the day and gathered information or conducted harassing raids at night. Some "civilians" apprehended by UNC troops carried mortar baseplates, mortar tubes, ammunition and hand grenades in packs. Other captured KPA soldiers each had a complete change of white civilian clothes and a package of 5,000 ROK won.

Espionage⁹

Although very effective and widespread throughout the war, KPA espionage was generally confined to the lowest tactical levels. Most agents were pri-

marily concerned with gathering tactical information in the immediate combat zone. Both the KPA and CVA, together with KPA guerrilla forces, used large numbers of poorly trained agents to gather information of military value. High-level intelligence was conducted by Political Security Bureau and KPA field-grade officers who were specially trained for intelligence and espionage work. These agents normally confined their activities to the supervision of subordinate information networks.

Missions given to agents varied with the sector to which they were assigned. Along the front, agents attempted to determine the location of the UNC main line of resistance, its strength, composition and disposition of various units, the number and types of weapons, the condition of roads, the objectives and movements of UNC patrols and the location of hidden foodstuffs. In forward areas the agents also determined the number and location of bridges, the location of artillery, armour and command posts and the location of the various refugee checkpoints. In the rear areas, in addition to noting the location and number of UNC troops, agents located National Police points and determined their strength. They took the names and addresses of civilians friendly toward the DPRK cause and those who collaborated with UNC forces. They also noted the attitude and feeling of refugees and local population.

Agents were recruited from both sexes and all ages. Young boys were very active in collecting information for the KPA and partisan bands. Some of the individuals employed had brought political disfavour upon themselves and tried to prove their loyalty by engaging in espionage activities. Agents were not well chosen and showed little enthusiasm for their work. There was evidently no authority which centralised selection, assigned missions or controlled agents. Young, middle-aged and elderly men and women were used singly, in pairs and in "family-type" groups to facilitate movement. One such agent used a stretcher in an attempt to pass through UNC lines. Two adults carried the agent, who posed as an ailing father, on the stretcher. Several young children, who knew they would be well fed as long as the agent needed them, willingly claimed him as their father. When apprehended he was found to have concealed weapons under the bed clothes. Other agents adopted one or more small children and mingled with *bona fide* refugees. Others disguised themselves as farmers or local civilians and some were left behind when the troops withdrew northwards. Others used mountain trails to avoid checkpoints. False passes were carried by the agents to be used when questioned. Some wore US clothing and pretended to be ROK soldiers separated from their units. Once an agent reached his assigned area, guerrilla and other Communist organisations protected him and transmitted the information he obtained. Sometimes, these organisations assigned the agent to further missions. Usually, agents transmitted their information orally but other information was concealed in the seams of their clothes or shoes, or in the private parts of their bodies. In rear areas, information gained by KPA agents was sent to the DPRK by radio.

KPA espionage agents used many methods of identification. Money was not only a means of identification but was also a means of transmitting messages. Japanese fifty-sen pieces indicated that the agent was a member of the Korean Worker's Party. Japanese coins of various denominations indicated types of arms (one sen—carbine, five sen—rifle, etc.). Other Japanese coins indicated the rank of the agent; the higher the denomination the higher the rank.

Buttons of various colours and buttons sewn with different coloured thread indicated an agent's identity. Cloth, broken spectacles which matched other

glasses, DPRK and ROK flags, hair cut in various manners, jackets, pencils, beans, various type of spoons and tattoo marks on the body were also used as identification. One captured agent carried a pocket full of various coins of all denominations, buttons in all colours, spoons and all known methods of identification carried by agents. Included in the coins were two-sen pieces dated in the eighth year of the reign of Emperor Meiji. These were the key coins and the agent's own identification pieces. The agent claimed the other coins and trinkets were a life-long collection.

Patrols¹⁰

Both the KPA and CVA placed more trust in information gathered from civilians and reconnaissance patrols than on the results of probing attacks. Another important source of information was captured UNC personnel. The KPA chose the time of arrival of UNC forces at a new location as the opportune time to capture prisoners. UNC personnel away from their unit, stragglers and wire men were desired prisoners. Patrols were instructed to cut telephone lines and wait to capture the linesmen.

Prior to departing on a mission to capture prisoners, the patrol would determine the weak point in the UNC defence line and select routes of approach and withdrawal. A rendezvous point was also selected.

A captured KPA prisoner from the 15th Infantry Division's reconnaissance company stated that reconnaissance units employed a capturing team which consisted of three groups with one leader. A support group of three men chose a location from which it was to engage UNC forces and, if necessary, would allow the capture group to go as far as possible. A capture group of three men, led by the team leader, had the mission of capturing one UNC soldier while the other groups covered. When the leader spotted hostile soldiers, he gave a signal by whistling or using a password.

The capture group never attempted to capture more than three UNC soldiers because this increased the possibility of failure. When two or more UNC soldiers were captured, one was kept and the others killed. When the capture group withdrew, the attack group of three men, which always worked with the capture group, remained in position to protect the capture group from possible UNC attack.

Daylight patrols consisted of approximately 18 men (night-time patrols would be larger), half of whom were dressed in civilian clothes. These were either unarmed or armed with pistols. The members of the patrols dressed in civilian clothes would attempt to infiltrate UNC lines. The remainder of the patrol waited for their return and furnished supporting fire if needed.

Apparently patrols always assumed a column formation with the squad leader at the head. If a three-column formation was employed, he assumed a position at the head of the centre column. The selection of routes differed with various units. Security guards were not employed as such and a point or rear guard was rarely used.

Avoiding defiles and crests of ridges was a characteristic of patrols when moving through mountainous terrain. Usually two parallel files were used to move forward just below the ridgelines of the mountain forming the defile. At night, each member of the patrol kept a three to five-pace interval from the man in front and, in daylight, from 10-20 paces. Control of the parallel files was

split between the leader and his deputy. Each led a file. Pre-arranged signals controlled the patrols such as the lighting of matches, blinking flashlight, clapping hands or whistling.

If the patrol was forced to move through a defile, a three-man point was sent 15–20 metres ahead of the main body. If it received fire from the surrounding hills, the main body rushed through or withdrew. This action was dependent upon the importance of the mission and the amount of fire encountered.

When the patrol moved across flat open terrain, it split into three columns. The squad leader led the three man centre column. The two flanking columns consisting of three men each moved slightly ahead of the centre column. The deputy squad leader either led one of the flanking columns or was situated at the rear. Audible signals were used in the open rather than visual means. Similar formations were used by patrols while moving through wooded areas. Control was maintained by whistling and lighting matches.

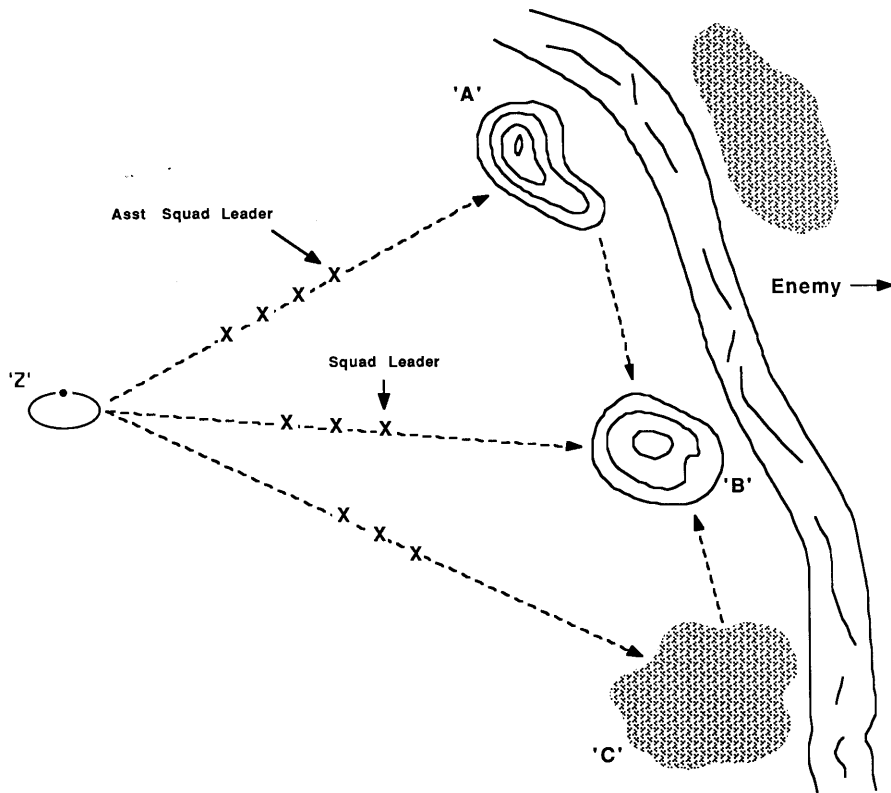
When a reconnaissance unit reconnoitred a ridgeline or high hill, a squad was normally sent out. When it reached the foothills, two patrol members took up posts at the base of the mountain and observed the sides of it. The remainder of the patrol gradually moved up the side in a single file. When it reached a point near the centre of the crest and just below it, the patrol turned through ninety degrees and moved in a single file parallel with the crest. If the mountain was clear of hostile troops, the two outposts at the base were signalled to join the patrol. If a further reconnaissance was needed, the patrol proceeded. If not, it returned by the same route.

Unit control appeared to dictate the formation used by reconnaissance patrols. If a fairly wide area was given to a patrol to reconnoitre, three or four members, with the deputy leader, were dispatched to reconnoitre the prominent terrain feature. The remainder of the patrol would remain in a defiladed position to the rear. If the area was clear, a message or signal was sent back to the squad leader. If UNC forces were sighted, a member of the first group was sent to warn the remainder of the patrol while the rest continued to observe. Usually KPA reconnaissance patrols withdrew if they saw hostile forces in any strength. Rarely were members left to continue observation.

If hostile forces were not sighted, another three-man team was dispatched to another area on the flank, and the squad leader took two men and reconnoitred an objective in the middle. Each team was given a time limit to check its area, after which it awaited a signal, either visual or audible, from the squad leader. When the signal was received, the two teams proceeded to rendezvous with the squad leader. The entire patrol then returned to its unit by the same route as it had approached.

Observation posts¹¹

Both the KPA and CVA used observation posts. Several observation posts would be prepared on high ground in one definite sector. Each was selected with an operation in mind and was well-camouflaged. Each observation post consisted of three members, two reconnaissance personnel and one staff officer. The method of observation was determined by high ranking officers only. The mission of the observation posts was to obtain intelligence pertaining to both communications and the mission of UNC forces. When available, com-



KPA tactics for area reconnaissance.

passes and telescopes were used in making observations and Very pistols for communication and deception.

At night, many ruses were employed to locate UNC artillery positions. In one instance, UNC artillery fire was brought to bear on what appeared to be lights of KPA vehicles. The next morning, a thorough reconnaissance of the area produced negative results. Because of the close proximity of the lights to the front lines, it was believed that the KPA simulated the vehicle lights to draw UNC artillery fire and thus, by sound and flash, locate the gun positions.

Exploitation of weak points in UNC lines¹²

When a boundary between two UNC units was spotted by the KPA or when they determined that UNC forces were shallow in depth, they were quick to exploit it. Reconnaissance companies and other units were infiltrated through the weak point to UNC rear areas where road blocks were established and harassing attacks made.

In the early stages of the conflict, the KPA demonstrated its ability to occupy supposedly inaccessible high ground and bridge other natural obstacles. In one instance, a KPA unit succeeded in infiltrating UNC lines by scaling practically

vertical cliffs. To accomplish this, they fired a form of harpoon, or anchor, with a rope attached to the high ground. When it was secured, troops climbed the rope and attacked UNC positions from the rear. In another case, UNC troops depended upon a river as a natural obstacle. KPA troops swam the river and ferried individual equipment over on logs. Temporary bridges were quickly constructed capable of supporting light vehicles, oxcarts and foot troops.

Pursuit and exploitation¹³

When an KPA attack succeeded in surrounding UNC forces, a major effort was made to separate and annihilate individual units. Pursuit was carried out only when commanders saw the opportunity of encircling UNC units. Generally, a company, supported by other units, pursued UNC forces until contact was broken. When troops pursued fleeing UNC soldiers, they used shouting as a psychological weapon to add to the confusion. In the early stages of the conflict, the KPA buried caches of ammunition and weapons to ensure supply during any future pursuit. When the KPA were able to maintain sound logistical support, their rate of advance generally conformed to the following table:

Terrain	Type of resistance	Rate of advance in km (miles) per day
Relatively flat	Light	15 (9.5)
	Moderate	7 (4.5)
	Heavy	less than 5 (3).
Rugged	Light	9 (5.5)
	Moderate	5 (3)
	Heavy	less than 3 (2)
Extremely rugged	Light	6 (4)
	Moderate	less than 5 (3)
	Heavy	less than 1.5 (1)

When extensive and rapid withdrawals were made by UNC forces, the KPA normally allowed contact to be broken due to their difficulty in maintaining adequate logistical support. After an objective was seized, temporary defensive positions were organised and orders issued for the next movement if one was contemplated. The second echelon of the attacking force would be responsible for mopping up the objective and consolidating the position.

The mopping-up method employed was a well co-ordinated plan. Blockades were set up at key points along lines of communication to prevent UNC vehicular traffic from withdrawing. Special units, lightly equipped and wearing disguises, carried out systematic searches during daylight hours of all likely places which offered concealment for UNC troops. CVA forces endeavoured to capture small isolated groups of UNC soldiers. Special emphasis was placed on the capture of commanders. All mopping-up operations were conducted with a company or platoon-sized front, search parties using a squad wedge formation. Reserve units were stationed at key positions along the mountain ridges to support the search and to provide for any emergency. Troops moved quickly

and under cover and carried out small envelopments of isolated UNC units. Ambushes were established before the searches began.

Counterattack¹⁴

Counterattacks are an integral part of the KPA defensive system and were used for various purposes:

- To blunt the edge of a UNC assault.
- To annihilate a portion of a hostile force.
- To recapture a lost position.

If the purpose of a counterattack was to delay UNC forces or blunt an offensive, the attack normally began early enough at night to ensure completion of the mission by daybreak. Counterattacks designed to regain a captured position began early enough in the evening to anticipate success by midnight. This allowed for the remainder of the night to be spent organising defensive positions for the next day's fighting.

The KPA would launch counterattacks when they believed that the opposing forces lacked depth or rear area support. They also counterattacked when UNC forces either appeared disorganised or used a captured position as a starting point for a new offensive action without consolidating.

Attacking units varied in size from a company to a regiment. A thorough reconnaissance of the terrain in the vicinity of the objective to establish enemy strength, disposition, armament and other needed information was normally completed by late afternoon or early evening before the attack. Before commencing the attack, all members of the attacking unit were briefed on routes of approach, signals to be used and plan of attack. The attacking force normally consisted of squad and platoon-sized groups.

The counterattack unit was formed up at some pre-arranged location on a flank 50–80 metres to the rear of the front defensive positions. Communication trenches connected the rear position to the front. An order for attack was usually given orally. The attacking force was usually divided into widely extended small groups of squad or platoon size which would approach UNC lines quietly and deployed, and then attack swiftly. Generally one squad would lead the triangular formation.

Envelopments, turning movements and penetrations were attempted by the KPA to exploit counterattacks. Troops were infiltrated into the rear areas and endeavoured to make the main assault on either both flanks between the front line troops and the reserves, or a weakly defended portion of the line. Normally, KPA counterattacks did not extend beyond the limit of frontal supporting fire and when a position was taken, the main body dispersed to the flanks to avoid UNC artillery fire.

If a planned withdrawal from the sector was made, delaying units covered the withdrawal of the main attacking unit. If the position was to be held, the KPA constructed fortifications and consolidated their position.

Withdrawal¹⁵

The regiment was the lowest echelon of command authorised to order a withdrawal. Assembly areas were not designated beforehand, and units withdrew

as far as possible during the hours of darkness under the protection of a delaying force. In a battalion withdrawal, all companies moved as one column in single file along the same route. Regiments used the same procedure. Variations of column movement were dictated by the terrain and the UNC situation. One or more battalions sometimes moved in parallel single-file columns, maintaining contact by radio, pyrotechnics and runners.

KPA doctrine dictated that withdrawal from combat under heavy hostile action would be conducted under cover of artillery and mortar fire, barriers, smokescreens and short counterattacks organised by senior commanders. So far as can be determined, however, no artillery or mortar fire supported any withdrawal of KPA forces during the Fatherland Liberation War. Because of lack of mobility, heavy weapons and artillery were moved to the rear prior to withdrawal of the main body of troops. Counterattacks were rarely made in conjunction with a withdrawal, although the last units to disengage, together with the delaying units, increased their volume of fire.

Tactical traps were used to lure attacking troops into a desired area. Withdrawals were made in conjunction with these operations to entice the UNC forces into attacking too hastily in an attempt at exploitation. During this operation, the KPA main force would be located in previously selected positions from which it could hit the flanks of the attacking forces.

During the early phases of the war, the KPA and CVA used an inverted "V" formation in conjunction with a mobile force. By withdrawing to high ground, they would allow UNC forces to enter the "V", where a numerically superior force would encircle the attacking column and close the "V". KPA and CVA groups would occupy forward slopes of ridges overlooking low ground and place fire on the encircled troops and at the same time attempt to destroy the first and last vehicle in a column to halt movement on the narrow roads. In the meantime, a sizeable force would be deployed to the rear to prevent the retreat of UNC units and the arrival of reinforcements.

Camouflage¹⁶

One of the most effective weapons of defence employed by the KPA was the use of camouflage. Methods of concealment and deception developed as the war progressed.

No special training in the art of camouflage was given to the average soldier, but each squad leader was responsible for teaching his men camouflage discipline. This was probably why UNC forces encountered such a wide variety of concealment and deceptive tactics. Caps and coats were equipped with a loop so that natural camouflage could be used. When no cover existed, the soldiers smeared dirt and mud over their clothing and faces.

Units up to battalion size escaped detection by UNC aircraft during the day by sleeping in ditches covered with pine branches or rolling up in straw mats and lying in orderly rows like piles of straw. During the retrograde movement in May 1951, soldiers carried pine branches. When UNC aircraft were overhead, they squatted and remained immobile. Had they had the sense to use the side of the road rather than the middle, they would have given the appearance from the air of an orderly row of bushes and might have avoided attack.

When an individual soldier dug his foxhole, he carefully removed the soil and concealed the hole with natural vegetation. He disposed of the dirt by placing it

on a cloth and then strewing it around his position, camouflaging it later with scrub pine, sod, rice straw or other materials at hand. Soldiers digging entrenchments were difficult to see unless they were skylined. They camouflaged their uniforms and shovels and, when digging, used short strokes.

Dummy positions and simulated targets were often employed to draw UNC fire. Straw dummies made to resemble riflemen, some partially clothed with discarded garments, succeeded in drawing considerable UNC small arms and machine gun fire.

Notes

- 1 US Army. "Enemy Tactics", HQ EUSAK, date?, pp. 20-25.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 80-81.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 40-44.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 46-48.
- 6 Ibid., p. 47.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 44-45.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 112-114.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 114-117.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 26-30.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 25-26.
- 12 Ibid., p. 46.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 50-52.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 82-83.
- 15 Ibid., pp. 79-81.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 93-94.

Chapter Four

Personnel and training

“The highest duty of a citizen is the protection of the Fatherland, and it is also an honor. A citizen must defend the fatherland and must serve in the Armed Forces . . .”
DPRK Constitution

Personnel¹

General

The soldiers of today's KPA are better fed, educated, motivated and equipped than their predecessors who fought in the Fatherland Liberation War. The average recruit, drafted for three years and six months, is 17–21 years of age.² He is probably from an urban background; educated, indoctrinated and motivated by the strict and regimented society of his country. His view of the world has been controlled since birth by the state-controlled information and educational systems. With an average height of only five feet six inches (1.65 metres), the KPA soldier is generally wiry and well muscled and kept in top physical condition by constant, strenuous physical training.³ Because of his mental and physical conditioning, the KPA soldier is noted for his stamina and capabilities in all types of terrain and weather. His capabilities of strength, daring and endurance are proverbial among those who have faced him in combat. The KPA soldier is taught to be a revolutionary combatant; strong in DPRK ideology, spiritual combat strength, determination not to betray the KWP, and not to surrender to enemy forces under any conditions.

The soldier of the Special Purpose Forces excels in all the above attributes for he is considered to be among the elite of the KPA and only the best are accepted for membership. SPF personnel are carefully selected, the majority being drawn from politically reliable soldiers who are well-regarded members of the Korean Worker's Party and who have served 4–7 years within the combat branches.⁴ Under rare and unusual circumstances (such as special language capabilities, unique skills, etc.), they can be recruited directly from civilian status (see *Mission training*).

Training⁵

The KPA's training system is designed to produce tough, disciplined and politically well indoctrinated soldiers who, by dint of their superior ideological training, physical conditioning, and superior skills in guerrilla warfare, can defeat a numerically and technologically superior enemy. Political and ideological training are stressed, as is the general education of the soldier. Soldiers

study the Fatherland Liberation War and the "anti-Japanese partisan struggle" to learn from those experiences. Mountain and night skills are taught and the soldiers are trained in both conventional and unconventional warfare. The training and the education teach the soldier to overcome all adverse conditions. They emphasise proficiency in conducting combined operations.

Special Purpose Forces training builds upon this basic instruction given to all soldiers. It is designed to produce an extremely well disciplined, politically well indoctrinated and fanatical fighter capable of accomplishing the most demanding conventional or unconventional missions. The skills and training that the members of the SPF receive, such as infiltration, mountaineering, night combat, swimming, martial arts, airborne proficiency, intelligence methods, demolition and rigorous physical fitness, are typical of elite units throughout the world. Discipline is considerably harsher, however, and a much stronger emphasis is placed upon intensive physical training and on political and ideological indoctrination.

The net result of the KPA's training system is tough, intensively trained fighters who can travel farther and faster with more equipment and less food than almost any other soldiers. They are mentally and physically hardened and disciplined, ready to obey orders and to suffer privations that would cause mutinies in other armies.

Recruit training

Before and during the Fatherland Liberation War most basic training was conducted at recruit training centres with advanced training being conducted at the recruit's assigned unit. By the end of the war this had changed. Most recruits received only the most basic military instruction at the training centres with the majority of a recruit's further training being conducted, if at all, within a training company in their assigned unit. Following the war, the training centres were abolished and recruit training was conducted completely within the unit. Today, prior to entering the army, the typical recruit receives basic military instruction in their school, place of employment or the militia. Following conscription, the recruit is assigned to a provisional training battalion or company for at least 30 days of basic recruit training.⁶

The mission of the recruit training unit is to provide instruction in basic military subjects. The recruit training unit normally receives recruits one to three times a year, between the months of March and October. Typical recruit training lasts one month and consists of approximately 180 hours of instruction. The normal size of the class is the platoon, with most subjects being taught by company or platoon commanders and squad leaders. Subjects taught include political doctrine, physical training, map reading, military order and discipline, military drill and ceremonies, first aid and hygiene, engineering, weapon training and tactics.

When recruits complete their training, they take the Soldier's Oath, receive their soldier's identification card and are assigned to an operational unit which has a predetermined need for replacements/reinforcements. The individual serves in the military from the date of his taking the oath until he is 27 years old. Enlisted personnel are assigned to specific branches of the service based upon their talents and educational background. Graduates from technical high schools are typically assigned to the artillery, chemical or signals corps. Those with relevant civilian experience are assigned to be drivers or

weapons and vehicle repair technicians. Individuals without any specific qualifications are assigned to the infantry or engineers. Recruits who have demonstrated exceptional political ability and who possess a good family background are assigned to military police duties, such as being part of the DMZ police force.⁷

Unit training⁸

Since 1959 the KPA has based its combat training programme on a yearly cycle. Exceptions include units attached to the technical branches and VIII Special Purpose Corps that may require more complex training lasting up to two to three years. The annual training programme is formulated by the General Staff Department of the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces and the commanders of the various arms and services. Overall guidance is provided by the Military Affairs Committee of the KWP Central Committee. The Military Affairs Committee's influential role in directing the policy and programmes of the KPA demonstrates the control that the KWP maintains over the army. Training programmes are published in book form each December. This document not only contains the annual training plan but also includes a summary and critique of the previous year's programme. KPA corps and divisional commanders are free to add such training phases as they consider necessary but always within the limitations of the original plan. Units at each echelon conduct training ranging from the basic training of troops to field exercises in order to satisfy the requirements set forth in the plan. It is important to note that political indoctrination, to ensure against deviation, takes precedence over all other training. It is conducted at all echelons down to company level and includes self-study for general officers.

The annual training programme begins in December and lasts until October of the following year. It is divided into two cycles with each training cycle in turn being divided into two or three phases. The first cycle is during the winter from 1 December until 30 April (five months). The second cycle is during the summer from 1 June until 31 October (five months). The training cycle from December to April is divided into two phases of three months and two months respectively. The training cycle from June to October is divided into three phases: the first phase would be one month and 10 days, the second phase two months and 10 days, and the third phase one month and 10 days. The training phases for DMZ Police and VIII Special Purpose Corps are somewhat different. DMZ Police units spend two months on sentry duty and two months conducting training (two platoons per company are rotated). This is repeated three times a year.

Each cycle consists of approximately 760 hours of training and progresses from individual unit exercises to joint service manoeuvres. The schedule of activities during a typical annual training is as follows:

December:	Construction of fortifications and preparation for winter training.
January:	Individual and squad training.
February:	Squad and platoon training.
March:	Platoon and company training.
April:	Company field training exercise and recruit training.
May:	Pause in training for agricultural activities and preparation for summer training.

June: Battalion training.
 July: Battalion field training exercise and recruit training.
 August: Regimental training.
 September: Regimental field training exercise and harvesting crops.
 October: Brigade/division/corps combined or joint manoeuvres; recruit training and preparation for winter.
 November: Construction of fortifications and repair of barracks.

Infantry unit training

Infantry unit training emphasises political education and unit cohesiveness and attempts to motivate the soldier to operate under the most severe conditions. Training subjects and hours are not fixed but are based on the General Staff Department's annual training programme and the mission of the unit. The training expands upon those subjects taught during recruit training to include military topography, defence against motorised and mechanised units, communications, enemy doctrine, and bivouacking. Great importance is placed on tactics and live-firing training. Political training is conducted in accordance with the annual political training programme established by the General Political Bureau.

Special Purpose Forces training⁹

*"To the [KPA], a squad of men who can march 50 kilometres with a 40 kilogram pack in 24 hours over mountainous terrain is worth more than a battalion of roadbound mechanised infantry."*¹⁰

General

Special Purpose Forces personnel are considered to be among the best-trained soldiers in the KPA.¹¹ In order to be accepted into VIII Special Purpose Corps, a soldier must typically have the following qualifications:

- Proven political reliability and zeal
- Served four to seven years in a combat branch
- Qualified as enlisted or senior private
- Graduated at junior high school or higher
- Personal recommendations by commanding officers for excellent duty performance
- Excellent physical condition

Once soldiers are accepted into VIII Special Purpose Corps, they are transferred to the training unit which exercises overall control and responsibility for all training. Here they are further screened for acceptability and receive basic special purpose training in much the same manner as they receive during recruit training. The basic special purpose training can last 12–24 weeks, or longer, depending upon the skill levels of the trainee and the type of unit to which they are to be assigned. This training is designed not only to provide specific skills instruction but to familiarise the trainee with basic special purpose tactics and operations. Additionally, the average length of service for VIII Special Purpose Corps personnel appears to be 11–12 years as compared with

8-10 years for other military personnel. VIII Special Purpose Corps is assisted in its training mission by all branches of the MPAF (e.g. the KPAF assists with airborne/airmobile, the KPN with amphibious training, the Reconnaissance Bureau with intelligence training).

Training

SPF units receive the same training as do infantry units but, unlike infantry units, they receive additional instruction in special combat skills and intelligence operations. Although this special training is typical of elite units throughout the world, discipline within the SPF is considerably harsher and strong emphasis is placed upon intensive political and ideological indoctrination. This indoctrination includes instruction in the "educational principles" according to Kim Il-sung's teachings for reconnaissance personnel. These principles include maintaining physical strength to overcome adverse conditions, conviction in accomplishing a mission, guerrilla warfare and lessons learned from the "anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle". Additionally, study of ROK dialects, customs, politics, economics and geography is stressed.

Key educational subjects taught to SPF units include;

Political studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works and virtues of Kim Il-sung Korean Worker's Party ideology and policies Revolutionary traditions Anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle Inconsistency in capitalistic society Winning spirit Juche Proselytising of the enemy populace Proselytising of enemy military personnel
Topography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced orienteering Map making Geography of the ROK
First aid and hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal hygiene Seasonal hygiene Advanced first aid
Weapon training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infantry weapons Mortars Anti-tank weapons Anti-personnel/tank mines Recognition of AFVs and artillery weapons Enemy weapons
Physical training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courage and confidence training Long-distance marching in all terrain¹² Swimming and boating Rock climbing Vehicle qualifications Airborne/airmobile training Amphibious training ROK dialects and customs

Regulations	SOPs Garrison SOPs Regulations governing discipline
Drill and Ceremony	Saluting and military courtesy Hand-to-hand combat (including knife fighting) Boxing and martial arts Rushing and crawling Combat formations
Engineering	Demolition Types and capabilities of mines Laying/removing mines (positioning, arming/disarming, etc.) Overcoming obstacles (concertina wire, fences, etc.) Live fire
Intelligence	Reconnaissance Intelligence gathering methods (including SIGINT, COMINT, etc.) Cryptography and photography Use of sophisticated communications equipment
Tactics	Employment of various types of weapons Weapons capabilities Assembling/disassembling of weapons Infiltration and exfiltration Escape and evasion Enemy organisation, doctrine and tactics Live training fire Bivouacking Covert movement and hideouts Ambush and surprise attack

Unit training

Unit training for SPF units, from basic training to combined field exercises, is conducted in order to satisfy the requirements set forth in the General Staff Department's annual training plan. However, due to the unique nature of their missions and the resulting demands for highly skilled and motivated troops, the yearly training cycle is significantly different from other KPA units. One complete training cycle may actually take one to three years. As with KPA corps and divisional commanders, the commander of VIII Special Purpose Corps is free to add training phases that he considers necessary within the limitations of the original plan.

Unit training generally takes place in one of three areas: the unit's home base, provisional field training areas or specialised training complexes. Airborne/airmobile training is conducted at two known locations, Taechon and P'yongyang East airfields and airborne training facilities. These facilities consist of an administrative/barracks area, parachutists training area and a mock-up field training area.¹³ The parachutists training area consists of aircraft mock-ups, rope slides, jump platform, parachute tower and other equipment typical of airborne facilities. Parachute training starts with static-line jumps and proceeds up to medium altitude free-fall jumps. Specially adept students may also receive high-altitude, high-opening and low-opening train-

ing. Jumps are made by day and night over all types of terrain and is made in a wider range of weather conditions than in the west. Some airborne troops also receive sailplane, ultralight and hot-air balloon training. Amphibious warfare training is believed to be conducted at the Tasa-ri (west coast) and Ijin-dong (east coast) naval bases.¹⁴ These facilities are believed to consist of an administrative/barracks area, an amphibious warfare training area and a general training area. Although light infantry and reconnaissance training is conducted throughout the country, it is primarily concentrated within the "forward" corps. These facilities can consist of some, or all, of the following: an administrative/barracks area, a mock-up training area, mock-up aircraft targets, air target range, dummy runway, false building fronts, obstacle course, ridge obstacle course, grenade course, mortar training range and an infantry combat range.¹⁵

Pieces of dummy equipment are generally used for training. They normally include replicas of tanks, field artillery, AAA, missiles and airframes. Tank mock-ups are used for anti-tank training (i.e. with the RPG-7), and as tank crew engagement targets. Artillery and AAA mock-ups are used to practice demolitions or close-in approach and simulated destruction. Missile mock-ups probably represent specific targets for destruction by direct ground assault. Helicopter and aircraft mock-ups are used for jump familiarisation, identification training, and simulators for demolition. The air targets (aircraft silhouettes) are used as tactical air bombing, helicopter assault and reconnaissance targets, while the dummy runway probably serves as a decoy to attacking air crews, as a practice range for the KPAF, or as a rehearsal area for demolition training. The ridge obstacle course consists of random crude obstacles such as log piles, ditches and walls placed along cleared paths on ridgelines. This course is similar to the obstacle/confidence courses found in armies throughout the world. The assault course is used to engage in dry-fire battle drills. It consists of a starting line, obstacles and bayonet dummies. The infantry combat ranges are smallarms ranges similar to US Army "trainfire" ranges. They are used to sharpen the marksmanship skills of the troops.¹⁶

NCOs and officers

NCOs for VIII Special Purpose Corps are obtained from one of three sources: the Corps NCO school, the NCO school of the General Staff Department or NCOs transferred to VIII Special Purpose Corps. The NCO schools provide six months of training intended to develop squad leaders. Admission criteria for the NCO schools are the same as for acceptance into VIII Special Purpose Corps but also include:

- Demonstrated leadership ability and potential for growth
- Membership of the KWP and personal recommendation by the KWP.

Officers are typically obtained from recent graduates of the various officer schools. The schools that are believed to provide the majority of SPF officers include: Kanggye Military Academy (special training), Kumgang Political School (General Staff Department—Reconnaissance (Intelligence) Bureau) and the Chunghwa Training School (psychological and guerrilla warfare).¹⁷ Officer schooling typically requires two to three years to complete with additional development courses lasting six months to a year.

Once a new officer or NCO is posted to VIII Special Purpose Corps he is processed through the Corps training unit where he undergoes specialty training, in much the same manner as the ordinary recruit, before being assigned to an operational unit.

Available evidence suggests that once basic SPF training is completed, the trainee is awarded a NCO or junior lieutenant rank and is assigned to an operational unit for the remainder of his career. The rank is probably awarded for pay-grade privileges, the prestige it bestows and as an indication of professionalism.¹⁸ Some sources indicate that a junior lieutenant rank is employed as a "cover rank" when conducting operational missions. The three reconnaissance personnel who conducted the 1983 assassination attempt on ROK President Chun Doo Hwan were all officers: Major Zin Mo (commander), Captain Kim Chi-o (demolitions specialist) and Captain Kang Min-chul (demolitions specialist).¹⁹

Mission training

Advanced and specific target/mission training is conducted within the operational units. During such training, units use a variety of realistic mock-ups. Frequently, "... they construct their own special purpose, widely scattered, non-permanent type mock-ups and facilities ... when convenience and training requirements dictate".²⁰ This training is made even more realistic by including night airdrops or amphibious assault landings and conducting no-holds-barred raids against other SPF units, or militia units defending target mock-ups. Some training facilities contain full-scale mock-ups of ROK/US weapon systems and facilities (i.e. aircraft, Lance and Hawk missiles, communications facilities). To enhance their operational capabilities, some personnel (especially reconnaissance) are believed to travel overseas as tourists, students, diplomats and economic and military advisers.

In preparation for the abortive 21 January 1968 raid on the ROK presidential residence to assassinate President Park Chung Hee, a 31-man unit from the 124th Army Unit underwent five days of specific training for the mission in the city of Sariwon (IV Corps) starting on 5 January. The provincial headquarters building was used to simulate the Blue House. Elements from the county Worker's Peasant Red Guard (WPRG) regiment was employed to simulate the ROK Army and security units.²¹

Practice assaults were conducted during the day and at night and with full equipment and weapons. Although little or no live-fire training was conducted, full use of hand-to-hand combat was permitted and such fighting became progressively more violent. On 9 January, a final practice assault was conducted with a full battalion of WPRG of approximately 500 men and woman being deployed to protect the building. During the ensuing raid approximately 30 WPRG members were detained in hospital due to injuries. Eight days later the unit was given its final mission briefing and infiltrated into the ROK.²²

One of the more impressive aspects of this operation was not the mission training itself but the fact that within 12 days the 124th Army Unit assembled, trained, briefed and deployed a platoon-sized unit for an extremely difficult and dangerous mission that nearly succeeded! This is not only indicative of an extremely high level of standard training but also of equally highly motivated personnel.

Details of the pre-mission training of the reconnaissance team for the Octo-

ber 1983 assassination attempt on ROK President Chun Doo Hwan are incomplete. It is known that the team received intensive specific training for the mission in the city of Kaesong (II Corps) and due to the nature of their mission they had obviously received intensive demolitions training. The members of the team were able to converse in Chinese, Russian and English, as well as Korean. The team received a final briefing by their unit commander before boarding the freighter *Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho* on 9 September 1983 to sail to Rangoon.

A recent KPA defector, Sergeant Hong Myong-jin from the 8th Infantry Division (II Corps) DMZ Police company, stated in June 1987 that "North Korean soldiers are in training for a raid and destruction at a training field modelled on the Myong-dong streets in the centre of Seoul".²³

Some mission training for reconnaissance and airborne personnel is conducted near the DMZ with the Hughes helicopters covertly acquired by the DPRK during 1984-5. These civilian machines resemble the anti-tank helicopters used in large numbers by the ROKAF. SPF units training with these helicopters have occasionally penetrated ROK airspace.

One of the most interesting aspects of mission training for SPF and KWP—Liaison Department personnel has been the use of kidnapped foreign nationals to train direct-action teams. Choi Un Hui, the ROK film star who was kidnapped by the DPRK in 1978 and escaped in 1986, reports that the DPRK has "systematically kidnapped foreigners—mainly women—to serve intelligence functions and other state purposes."²⁴ This was confirmed by the confessions of Kim Hyon-hui, the KWP agent who placed the bomb on KAL Flight 858, who states that for two years she lived with a kidnapped Japanese woman in P'yongyang to become familiar with Japanese customs and manners.²⁵ These foreign nationals include Chinese, Japanese, Jordanian and French citizens. They are employed primarily to instruct SPF and KWP—Liaison Department personnel in the language and customs of their native countries.²⁶

There have been unconfirmed reports that Soviet *Spetsnaz* units have conducted training operations, presumably with SPF units, within the DPRK.

Combat techniques

Combat techniques include all standard KPA combat tactics such as ambush, envelopment, employment of mines and booby traps, raids, etc. In addition, the use of disguises to accomplish a mission is practiced. There are no indications of the methods used to obtain pre-operational intelligence. However, it is reasonable to suspect that great reliance is placed upon KWP Liaison Department agents to provide the required information. The indications are that, during actual operations, units use basic intelligence gathering techniques to gather information required to support their own operations.²⁷

Despite the large number of SPF operations against the ROK, the number of SPF personnel who have been captured or who have surrendered is extremely small. The reason for this is the SPF policy of self-destruction instead of capture. This policy dates back to at least the 1960s and extends to today. During the 1960s, members of the 124th Army Unit were instructed to kill themselves rather than be captured; they did so on numerous occasions. Almost all of the numerous seaborne infiltrations during the 1970s ended with the self-destruction of the infiltrators and their craft. The three reconnaissance brigade members who conducted the October 1983 Rangoon bombing were also instructed to kill themselves rather than be captured. Captain Kim Chi-o was

shot and killed, while Major Zin Mo and Captain Kang Min-chul were seriously injured when they attempted to blow themselves up.²⁸

Logistics

When deployed for unconventional warfare operations, logistical support is provided by VIII Special Purpose Corps or the headquarters to which the SPF unit is attached. There is presently no substantial information as to how units conducting extended operations will re-supply themselves. Training literature indicates that the units will live off the land, raid enemy supply depots, purchase food from civilians or, as a last resort, steal from the local population. It is possible that under special circumstances very limited airborne/amphibious supply is available.²⁹

Uniforms and insignia

During training it appears that SPF personnel are provided with standard KPA infantry uniforms. During operational missions SPF personnel have been known to be attired in civilian clothing (including female disguises), ROKA uniforms, mottled camouflaged uniforms in summer and, in winter, an all-white over-garment. It is not known if there are any special unit insignia or markings to indicate membership in a SPF unit.

Notes

1 Defence Intelligence Agency. "North Korean Army Training—Steadily Progressing", *Defence Intelligence Digest*, June 1968, pp. 29–31; and US Army. "OPFOR: North Korea", TC-30-37, January 1979, pp. 1-1 and 1-2.

2 Although the term of service is officially 3 years and 6 months, the majority of the personnel are required to serve until they are 27 years old, with an average term of service of 9 years.

3 Personnel are considered unfit for the following reasons: height less than 4'9" (1.45m), weight less than 100lbs (45.4kg), hypertension, hernia (hernia and correctable deficiencies are often rectified in government hospitals after which an individual is considered fit for military service), tuberculosis, heart ailments, psychiatric illness, loss of limb, fingers or more than two toes. US Army. "North Korean Paramilitary Reserve Forces", SRD-23-C/NORFORN-76, 1 August 1976, p. V.

4 The politically unreliable category is defined as including: former landlords and wealthy farmers and their families ("families" include the extended immediate family down to and including grandchildren and grandchildren-in-law); former capitalists and their families; families of defectors to the Republic of Korea; former Japanese government employees and their families; persons identified as "reactionary elements" and ex-convicts. Politically unreliable personnel are refused employment at government agencies, important industries, public service facilities and institutions of higher education and are discriminated against socially. "North Korean Paramilitary Reserve Forces", p. I-15; "OPFOR: North Korea", p. 3-2; "Escape From the Jaws of Death (II)", *Vantage Point*, June 1987, Vol. X, No. 6, p. 16; and "Escape From the Jaws of Death (III)", *Vantage Point*, June 1987, Vol. X, No. 7, pp. 20–21.

5 "North Korean Army Training—Steadily Progressing", pp. 29–31; and US Army, "North Korean People's Army Operations", FC 100-2-99, 5 December 1986, Chapter 16 "Educational and Training System".

6 The size of the training unit is apparently dependent upon the size of the parent unit. With a regiment/brigade typically having a training company, while a division or corps has a training battalion. "North Korean Armed Forces Modernization", p. 14.

7 The DMZ Police are responsible for security along the DMZ. There are approximately 10 DMZ Police Battalions deployed within I, II & V "Forward" Corps. Each battalion apparently attaches one company to each infantry division deployed on the DMZ. These companies are deployed in platoons which rotate every two months. These units perform sentry duty and

normal military police functions. They may also be employed to conduct agent escort, scouting and reconnaissance operations.

8 "North Korean Army Training—Steadily Progressing", pp. 29-31.

9 "OPFOR: North Korea", pp. 1-5 & 5-3; and "North Korean Infiltration Raises Specter of Insurgency", pp. 4-6.

10 "OPFOR: North Korea", p. 3-1.

11 As an interesting note, Soviet Spetsnaz units operating "... in the Soviet Far East are alleged to include North Koreans and Japanese ...". Kohler, Lt Cdr David R. "Spetsnaz", *Proceedings*, August 1987, p. 50.

12 One source indicates "We filled backpacks with 66 pounds of sand and ran, often in bare feet, over mountain trails until we could cover 40 miles in six and half hours." "Mission: To Murder A President", p. 144.

13 Defence Intelligence Agency, "North Korean Air Assault Forces", IAR-2-78, June 1978, p. vi.

14 Amphibious warfare training may also be conducted in the Sinp'o/Mayang-do area (east coast).

15 Defence Intelligence Agency, "North Korean Light Infantry and Reconnaissance Units", IAR-7-77, January 1978, p. vi.

16 "North Korean Light Infantry and Reconnaissance Units", pp. 9, 17 and 28.

17 McCune, pp. 6-7.

18 Officers and senior NCOs receive privileged treatment in housing, regular leave, consumer goods, etc. There is also a wide disparity in KPA pay grades with a private or private 1st class receiving a monthly salary of approximately 2-2.5 won (2.14won = US\$1.00); senior sergeant or master sergeant, 5.5-7.5 won; junior lieutenant or lieutenant, 75-78 won. For comparison a doctor's typical monthly salary is 100-120 won. Special Purpose personnel also receive jump, longevity and hazardous duty allowances.

19 "Details of Burma Bombing Revealed in Confession", *The Korea Herald*, 27 November 1983, p. 4; and "Terrorists Enter Rangoon as 'Sailors' ", *The Korea Herald*, 27 November 1983, p. 1.

20 US Army. "North Korean Unconventional Warfare Capability", SRD-8-SC/NORFORN-76, 20 February 1976, p. 13.

21 A Worker's Peasant Red Guard regiment can have a strength of 1,000 to 8,000 personnel, with the typical regiment having a strength of 3,000 to 4,000. A battalion has a strength of approximately 400. "North Korean Paramilitary Reserve Forces", pp. 2-3.

22 "Mission: To Murder A President", pp. 142-147.

23 "P'yang wages Propaganda for Armed Revolt in South", *The Korea Herald*, 28 June 1987, p. 8.

24 Oberdorfer, Don, "North Korea Accused of Kidnapping Women", *Washington Post*, 24 January 1988, p. A23.

25 Agency for National Security Planning (ROK), "Results of the Investigation into the Bombing of Korean Air Flight 858", 15 January 1988, p. 5.

26 Ibid and Hiatt, Fred, "Japan Kidnappings May Lead to N. Korea Spy Case", *Washington Post*, 20 January 1988, p. A19; and Maas, Peter, "S. Korea Accuses North After Agent's Confession", *Washington Post*, 16 January 1988, p. A16.

27 "North Korean Unconventional Warfare Capability", p. 12.

28 "Details of Burma Bombing Revealed in Confession", p. 4; and "Terrorists Enter Rangoon as 'Sailors' ", p. 1.

29 "North Korean Unconventional Warfare Capability", p. 12.

Chapter Five

VIII Special Purpose Corps¹

VIII Special Purpose Corps "... is the strongest elite force of the entire Korean People's Army and is the unique vanguard force of the Armed Forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea."—Kim Il-sung.

General

In the years immediately following the signing of the 1953 Armistice Agreement which ended the overt hostilities of the Fatherland Liberation War, several competing DPRK military and intelligence units remained actively engaged in what may be described as guerrilla or unconventional warfare operations against the ROK. However, during the late 1960s numerous re-organisations and re-alignments of the DPRK government and KPA occurred, resulting in a single tactical headquarters—VIII Special Purpose Corps—being tasked with the overall responsibility for unconventional warfare and special operations within the KPA.²

In the aftermath of its disastrous 1968 failures, the 124th Army Unit was disbanded and shortly afterwards, during early 1969, VIII Special Purpose Corps was activated in its place.³ This new unit was built around a cadre drawn from the 124th Army Unit and augmented by elements from the 283rd Army Unit and an unidentified light infantry brigade (possibly the 17th Airborne [Reconnaissance] Brigade).⁴ At the same time, those light infantry regiments deployed within the "forward" corps underwent re-organisation to expand them to brigade-sized units and enhance their unconventional warfare capabilities with special emphasis on "lighter arms and faster foot pace".⁵

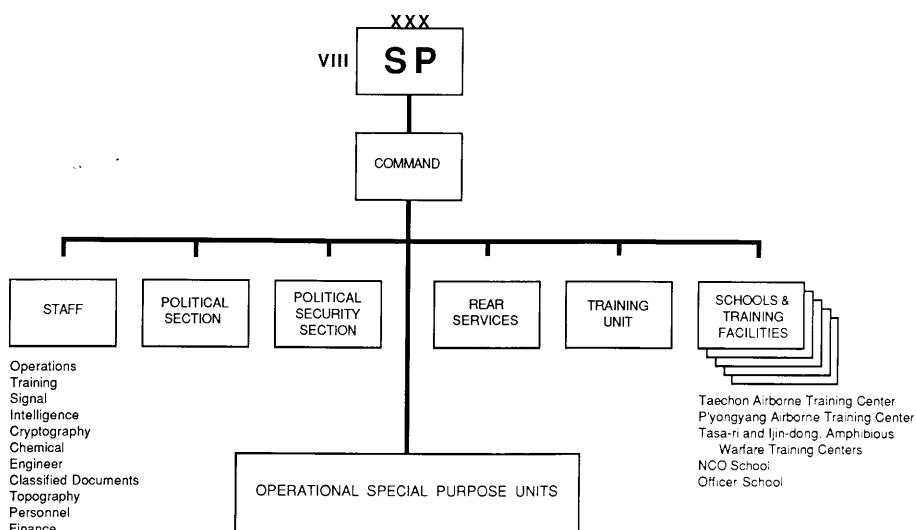
Shortly after its activation, VIII Special Purpose Corps received a number of newly expanded light infantry brigades. Other light infantry regiments were either subordinated to the "forward area group corps" (later called "forward" corps) headquarters or disbanded and their battalions subordinated to the infantry divisions within these corps. The "rear area" corps also began to receive light infantry units but at a much reduced level. Each "rear area" corps received a light infantry battalion and subordinate divisions a light infantry company. The Foot Reconnaissance Centres were also disbanded at this time and their personnel placed with VIII Special Purpose Corps or the reconnaissance brigades. Four of the reconnaissance brigades were reorganised and subordinated to VIII Special Purpose Corps. The remaining reconnaissance brigades were disbanded to act as a cadre for new special purpose units. These organisational changes were accompanied by a change of doctrine from an unconventional warfare doctrine almost solely committed to

guerrilla warfare to a more balanced concept. More significantly, however, was the inclusion of special operations within this new doctrine. This change in doctrine was evinced by VIII Special Purpose Corps and its subordinate units in their metamorphosis into units capable of special operations (especially the reconnaissance brigades). These capabilities would eventually develop along lines similar to current Soviet *Spetsnaz* capabilities.

Command and control

Command and control of VIII Special Purpose Corps extends from the premier of the DPRK, Kim Il-sung (the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and chairman of the Korean Worker's Party), through the Central People's Committee and its National Defence Commission, to the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces and its General Staff Department. From the General Staff Department it flows to VIII Special Purpose Corps and its operational units.⁶ Additional, command and control, as well as administrative and technical support, is exercised by the DPRK intelligence community including the: National Intelligence Committee, Cabinet Intelligence Committee, KWP Liaison Department, Reconnaissance Bureau and General Political Bureau General Staff Department, and the Political Security Department. These agencies exercise a varying amount of control over the operational aspects of VIII Special Purpose Corps. With such control apparently being strongest with the reconnaissance brigades and weakest with the light infantry brigades and independent combined arms brigades.

The National Intelligence Committee is chaired by Kim Il-sung and is the overall co-ordinating agency for all intelligence, unconventional warfare and special operations. The Cabinet Intelligence Committee appears to be primarily responsible for the collation of information gathered by other intelligence agencies and disseminating finished intelligence products to these agencies. The General Staff Department's Reconnaissance Bureau is primarily concerned with the collection of military intelligence. It also provides escorts for the intelligence units of the KWP Liaison Department and Political Security Department. To facilitate close co-operation with these departments, SPF personnel are attached to both these agencies. The KWP Liaison Department is primarily responsible for conducting positive non-military intelligence operations. It also functions as an operational control agency over its own intelligence units, those of the Political Security Department and the Reconnaissance Bureau. Additionally, it conducts background investigations and assists in training personnel for these units. The General Political Bureau is responsible for conducting psychological warfare operations and propaganda activities against ROK/US civilian and military personnel, as well as to direct the political education, indoctrination, morale and party activities of all KPA personnel. Under the auspices of its Propaganda and Instigation (agitation) and Enemy Affairs Guidance (psychological warfare) sections, this bureau conducts limited unconventional warfare operations. The Political Security Department is responsible for all internal intelligence and security operations within the DPRK and reports directly to Kim Il-sung. Its responsibilities include: railway security, communications, national police, counter-espionage, providing bodyguards for officials, etc.



VIII Special Purpose Corps.

- Organisation and supervision of the tactical training of subordinate special purpose units and the training of support personnel.

Operational SPF units include nine light infantry brigades, 35 divisional light infantry battalions, three amphibious light infantry brigades, eight airborne light infantry brigades, four reconnaissance brigades and five combined-arms brigades. These units are deployed throughout the DPRK and can be organised into four general groupings:

- SPF brigades directly subordinate to VIII Special Purpose Corps and not located within the “forward” corps, include eight airborne light infantry, three amphibious light infantry (attached to Navy Command HQ), one reconnaissance and three light infantry brigades.
- SPF brigades subordinate to I, II and V “forward” Corps. Within I Corps are one reconnaissance and one light infantry brigades; within II Corps, one reconnaissance and three light infantry brigades and within V Corps, one reconnaissance and two light infantry brigades. The “forward” corps appear to control these brigades during peacetime. During wartime operations control will revert to VIII Special Purpose Corps.
- The divisional level light infantry battalions attached to each of the KPA’s 35 infantry, motorised/mechanised infantry divisions. It is known that the approximately 16 infantry/mechanised infantry divisions deployed within the “forward” corps have organic light infantry battalions. However, the status of these battalions within the remaining 19 infantry, motorised/mechanised infantry divisions is uncertain. It is probable that some of these battalions are still understrength.
- The five combined-arms brigades directly subordinate to the General Staff Department and deployed within VII Corps.

Notes

1 Defence Intelligence Agency. "North Korean Special Purpose Forces", DDB-1100-475-84, May 1984; US Army. "North Korean Army Unconventional Warfare Capability", SRD-8-SC/NORFORN-76, 20 February 1976; and Bermudez Jr., Joseph S. "North Korea's Light Infantry Brigades", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Vol. 6, No. 19, 15 November 1986, pp. 1176-78.

2 Ibid.

3 VIII Special Purpose Corps is also known as the: "Eighth Special Duties Army Group"; "Light Infantry Army Group"; "Reconnaissance Army Group"; "3729th Unit"; and "Strategic Forces Command".

4 Manabu, p. 64.

5 Ibid.; and Choi Young, p. 345.

6 The commander of the VIII Special Purpose Corps, at least up until 1982, is believed to be Kim Chol-man. He fought as a partisan against the Japanese during their occupation of Korea. *Vantage Point*, "The Rise of Kim Jong-Il and the Heir Succession Problem," December 1987, Vol X, No 12, p. 6.

Chapter Six

Light infantry brigades and battalions¹

“One of the earliest indications that North Korea was maximising its offensive potential was the substantial enlargement of its formidable ranger/commando force.”
DIA²

General

Following the failure to exploit ROK vulnerabilities during the 1960 student uprisings against the Syngman Rhee government and the subsequent ROKA military coup *d'état* of 16 May 1961, the intelligence agencies of the DPRK underwent a reorganisation. Partly as a result of this, and partly as a by-product of the continuing reorganisation within the KPA, a majority of the miscellaneous intelligence and unconventional warfare units were disbanded and two new types of unit were activated: the “foot reconnaissance” brigades and light infantry regiments. The “foot reconnaissance” brigades were apparently formed around a cadre of former Branch unit, guerrilla and “sniper” personnel. The light infantry regiments were apparently organised from disbanded corps/divisional-level reconnaissance and guerrilla units. These light infantry regiments were subordinated to the “forward area group corps” (later called “forward” corps) commanders.

With the activation of VIII Special Purpose Corps during 1969, the status of the light infantry regiments was to change dramatically. The majority of those light infantry regiments located within the “forward area group corps” were either expanded to brigades or disbanded. Those expanded to brigades were subordinated to either VIII Special Purpose Corps or the “forward area group corps” headquarters (one apiece). Those light infantry regiments not expanded were disbanded and the light infantry battalions made available by this action were subordinated, one apiece, to the infantry divisions within the “forward area group corps”. Efforts were also made to expand the number of light infantry units. As more light infantry personnel became available new units were established and subordinated to the “rear area” corps. This happened at a very slow rate with most “rear area” corps initially receiving a light infantry battalion.

These organisational changes were accompanied by a change in the doctrine of unconventional warfare from one of guerrilla warfare to a more balanced concept with strong emphasis being placed upon rapid infiltration and disruption of enemy rear areas through concealed movement—“lighter arms

and faster foot pace". More significantly, however, was the inclusion of special operations within this new doctrine.

During the mid to late 1970s the light infantry units within the "rear area" corps had expanded considerably. Each corps now had an attached light infantry brigade or several airborne light infantry battalions and their subordinate divisions an organic light infantry battalion or company. The "forward" corps also received additional light infantry assets, now having an attached reconnaissance brigade and one or two light infantry regiment/brigades. By 1982 the light infantry units within the "rear area" corps had been increased to their current level, with an attached light infantry brigade or airborne light infantry brigade at corps level, and an organic light infantry battalion at divisional level. Within the "forward" corps the deployment of SPF units reached its current level with all light infantry units being expanded to brigade size.

With the exception of the combined-arms brigades, the light infantry brigade structure forms the basic building block for all SPF brigades. The differences between the various types of SPF unit are designed to suit their primary mission, training and equipment. KPA doctrine calls for the integration of these units, with their unconventional warfare and special operations capabilities, into all phases of combat operations. Of the 24 light infantry type brigades (light infantry, airborne, amphibious, and reconnaissance), nine are organised as standard light infantry brigades. These do not include the 35 divisional light infantry battalions.

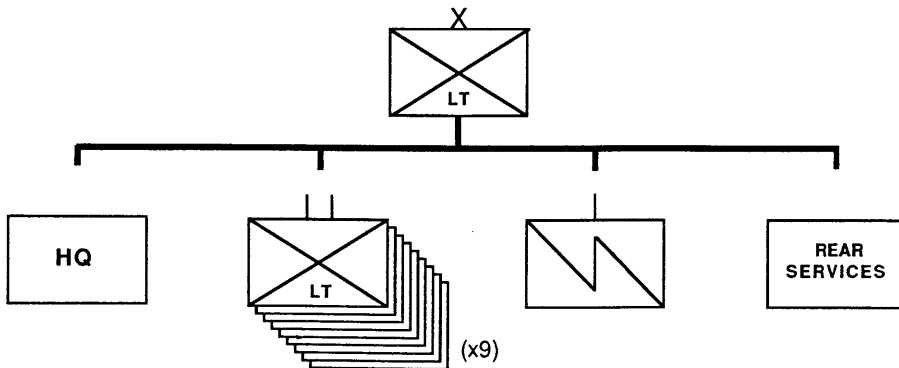
Missions

In general the primary missions assigned to the light infantry brigades and divisional light infantry battalions would be tactical/operational in nature and be confined to within the corps area of operations. The light infantry battalions would focus their operations in the forward zone, from a point some 15-30km in the rear of ROK/US positions back towards the FEBA positions, while the light infantry brigades would focus their operations from this point out to the edge of the corps area of operations (deeper into the ROK/US rear area). Operations in the area beyond the edge of the corps area of operations (the ROK/US strategic rear) would be the responsibility of the airborne light infantry, amphibious light infantry and reconnaissance brigades. The standard light infantry units have the capability, training and equipment to conduct battlefield infiltration in order to execute the following missions:

- Enveloping, or flanking, attacks in support of the division and corps.
- The seizure or destruction of nuclear, C³I, chemical and missile assets and sensitive facilities (especially airfields and POL storage) within the forward areas.
- The interdiction, seizure or control of forward area lines of communication, primarily those used for the reinforcement or re-supply of forces deployed on the DMZ.
- Seizure and control of important topographic features (mountain passes, hills, rivers, etc.) and civilian facilities (dams, powerplants, etc.).
- Augmenting corps and divisional reconnaissance assets.
- Unconventional warfare operations.
- Rear-guard and delaying operations.

Organisation

The KPA's light infantry brigades and divisional light infantry battalions represent a formidable and well-trained force of approximately 44,000–48,000 troops. The brigades are deployed as follows: I Corps (forward)—one; II Corps (forward)—three; IV Corps—two; V Corps (forward)—two and VII Corps—one. Each of the KPA's 35 infantry, motorised infantry and mechanised infantry divisions has an organic light infantry battalion. The light infantry brigade is normally commanded by a major-general or senior colonel and has a personnel strength of approximately 3,800 (464 officers and 3,336 enlisted man). It is organised into a headquarters, signals company, rear services and nine light infantry battalions.



Light infantry brigade.

Personnel and equipment strengths of these components are as follows:

HQ and rear services—35 officers, 90 enlisted men, 35 Type 68 7.62mm pistols, 90 AK-47 7.62mm assault rifles, 1 RPD/RPK 7.62mm light machine gun, 2 Sungri 415 trucks, 6 Sungri 58/61 trucks.

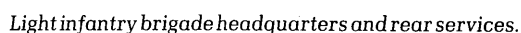
Light infantry battalions (total) 324 officers, 3,276 enlisted men, 558 pistols, 3,366 assault rifles, 234 LMGs, 216 RPG-7 anti-tank rocket launchers, 108 AT-3 anti-tank missile systems, 108 60/82mm mortars, 54 SA-7 surface-to-air missile systems, 9 Sungri 58/61 trucks.

Signals company—6 officers, 69 enlisted men, 6 pistols, 69 assault rifles, 1 anti-tank rocket launcher, 1 Sungri 415 truck, 5 Sungri 58/61 trucks.

Brigade (totals)—365 officers, 3,435 enlisted men, 599 pistols, 3,525 assault rifles, 235 LMGs, 217 anti-tank rocket launchers, 108 anti-tank missiles systems, 108 mortars, 54 surface-to-air missile systems, 3 Sungri 415 trucks, 20 Sungri 58/61 trucks.

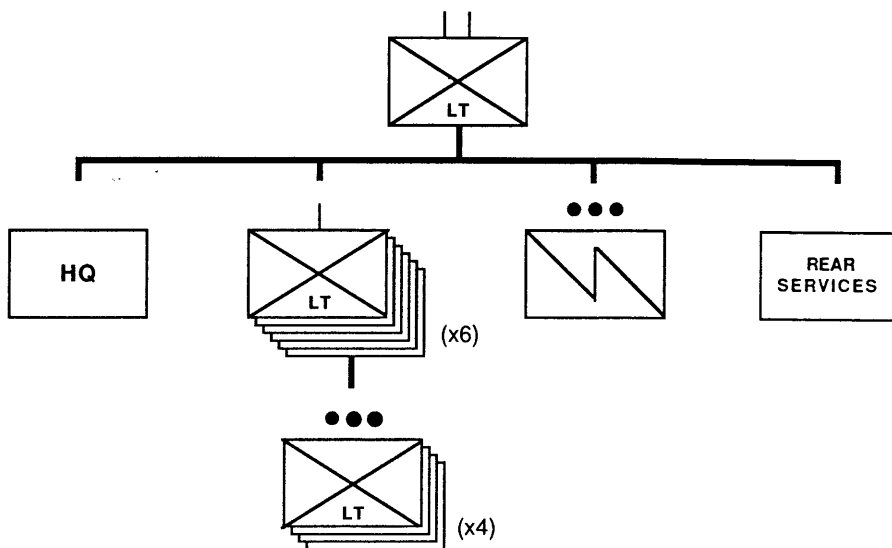
The headquarters is organised into command, staff, political, political security and rear services elements. There is presently no detailed information concerning the particular functions performed by the light infantry brigade headquarters staff, however, it is believed that the following is a reasonably accurate estimate:

- **Commander and operations staff** perform essentially those duties attributed to the S1, S2 and S3 in US Army organisations.



- The Light infantry battalion is the brigade's basic element for combat operations. Each battalion, and each divisional light infantry battalion, is normally commanded by a colonel and has a personnel strength of approximately 400 (36 officers and 364 enlisted men). It consists of a headquarters (organised along the same lines as the brigade HQ), signals platoon, rear services and six line companies of four platoons each. Each platoon is composed of three to four squads.³

80



Light infantry battalion.

Equipment

In general the combat equipment of SPF units varies considerably depending upon specific mission requirements. Small teams only carry personal equipment, light arms and equipment for their specific mission. While larger teams also carry crew-served weapons. Equipment likely to be found within the light infantry brigades, and other SPF units, includes:

- Uniforms: during training it appears that light infantry personnel are provided with standard KPA infantry uniforms. During combat operations they are typically attired in civilian clothing (i.e. women's clothing including wigs, civilian clothing with temporary camouflage, etc.), ROKA uniforms (typically with officer ranks), mottled camouflaged uniforms in summer and an all-white over-garment in winter.
- Compass and map.
- Flashlight and watch.
- Dagger or bayonet.
- Pistol: primarily carried by officers. These have included 7.62mm Type 64/68 pistols; silenced versions of the 9mm Browning automatic and Soviet 7.62mm Tokarev automatic pistols.
- Binoculars.
- Gas Mask: ShM "k" series or its Czech or Polish versions.
- Knapsack, poncho and blanket.
- Canteen and mess kit.
- First-aid kit.
- Entrenching tool.
- Mission rations (often carried on a ROK-type web belt).
- Rope and hook (the hook is not only used for climbing but for digging).

- Rifle: Type 58 (AK47), Type 68 (AKM), Czechoslovak “Skorpion”, M16, M3 and others.⁴
- Light machine guns: 7.62mm Type 64 (RPK) and 7.62mm RPD.
- Hand grenades/demolitions (KPA, PRC, ROK and US). Personnel are often “wired” with explosives to allow them to destroy themselves if capture is inevitable.
- Mines: anti-personnel and anti-tank.
- ATGMs: RPG-7 or AT-3 Sagger.
- ATWs: 82mm B-10 or 107mm B-11 recoilless gun.
- SAMs: SA-7 Grail
- Mortars: 60mm or 82mm M-37.
- Ammunition.
- Radio: DPRK manufactured AM transmitter with scratch pad or scramble sheets and commercial (i.e. Panasonic) receivers.
- Special mission equipment: Bundles of ROK currency, 35mm cameras with 400mm + telephoto lens and 50-100 rolls of film (including infrared), ELINT/SIGINT equipment, encryption/decryption devices (depending upon mission), etc.⁵

Due to the variation in unit size and the fact that the weapons “mix” is tailored to specific missions, it is extremely difficult to calculate the actual numbers of weapons in a unit. However, it is believed that the following is a reasonably accurate estimate for a standard light infantry battalion: 370-380 assault rifles, 50-60 pistols, 20-30 LMGs, 20-30 RPGs, 9-12 ATGMs or recoilless guns, 12-20 mortars and 4-6 SA-7s.

Offensive operations

Generally speaking the divisional light infantry battalions will conduct unconventional warfare operations within 15-30km of the FEBA and will be concerned with assisting the operations of their parent division. Operating in platoon and company-sized units, the battalion will concentrate on targets of immediate tactical importance in order to isolate ROK/US units deployed along the FEBA by operating from their tactical rear. Tactical targets will include:

- Division, brigade and battalion command posts. It is hoped that by the destruction or disruption of these headquarters those units deployed along the FEBA will be isolated from each other and from their fire support assets so that they can then be reduced individually.
- Important terrain features: mountains, passes, rivers, bridges, tunnels, etc. Control of such terrain features will prevent ROK/US units from being reinforced or from shifting forces laterally.
- Military/civilian airfields and heliports. These will be seized to both deny their use to the ROKAF/USAF and thus limit air operations over the FEBA and to provide forward operating bases for the airborne light infantry units, thus extending the distance to which they can be deployed in the ROK.
- Artillery assets and anti-tank defensive positions. The ROK/US defence of the area north of Seoul is based upon the use of successive lines of extensive anti-tank obstacles and the employment of concentrated artillery fire. These successive lines of anti-tank obstacles are not to be manned by with-

drawing troops but rather by mobilised reserves. If they are not properly manned they are useless. The light infantry battalions and brigades would attempt to occupy these positions before the mobilised reservists thus denying them their use or, at minimum, forcing them fight for their own defensive positions. Such a situation is likely to have a significant effect on reservist morale. ROK/US strategy also calls for the employment of concentrated artillery fire, yet there are limited numbers of medium and heavy artillery systems. The loss of any would have a significant effect on the ability of ROK/US ground forces to hold their positions.

In addition to the above, teams from the light infantry battalion would augment the division's reconnaissance assets, provide the primary forces for any envelopments attempted by the division and have the capability to conduct extended operations deeper within ROK territory. However, it is unlikely that these teams would be detached from the division or operate outside the division's area of operations.

The light infantry brigades conduct unconventional warfare operations in the area between 30 and 70 km from the FEBA (i.e. out to the edge of the corps area of operations) and will be concerned with assisting the operations of the corps. Operations beyond this will be the responsibility of the other SPF units. Operating in platoon and company-sized units, the brigade will concentrate on isolating ROK/US units deployed along and immediately behind the FEBA. Targets for light infantry brigades are on a larger scale at a higher level (i.e. army, corps, division) and at a greater depth than those of the light infantry battalion. They will include:

- Army, corps and divisional command posts and C³I facilities. The objective would be the capture or destruction of these elements so as to limit the ability of ROK/US formations to identify the major KPA avenues of approach and initiate appropriate responses; and to isolate the ROK/US corps deployed along the FEBA. Attacks on these facilities, especially theatre/global C³I installations, could have a significant effect on the initial stages of a war.
- Lines of communication. These would be severed at choke points to isolate the ROK/US units deployed along the FEBA, reduce their ability to conduct a protracted defence and facilitate their being divided into small pockets of resistance to be destroyed piecemeal. This interdiction would also have a serious effect on the ROK mobilisation effort and the morale of mobilised units. They would also help to create the conditions necessary for an envelopment, or double envelopment.
- Military/civilian airfields and heliports. These facilities would be seized in a combined action with airborne light infantry and reconnaissance units in order to destroy a significant number of ROK/US aircraft on the ground or render the airfields inoperable.⁶ This would limit the extent of ROK/US air superiority during the initial stages of an attack. As the US plans to conduct theatre reinforcement by airlift, the loss or interdiction of any major airbase would significantly affect the successful conduct of the defence.
- Anti-tank defensive positions and army/corps-level artillery/rocket assets. Elements from the light infantry brigades would assist, at a greater depth, the light infantry battalions to seize the successive lines of artillery positions and anti-tank obstacles along the approaches to Seoul before they could be manned by mobilised reservists. This would facilitate a rapid KPA

armoured advance on the capital and the envelopment of ROK/US units deployed along the DMZ. Army/corps-level artillery/rocket assets (175 mm, MLRS, Lance, etc.) would be sought out and destroyed. The importance of these units is their ability to direct long-range fire on the KPA's operational rear. More important, however, are their nuclear and chemical delivery capabilities.

- Army, corps and divisional-level POL, supply, storage and mobilisation facilities. The capture or destruction of these facilities within the forward areas would deny ROK/US forces the means to conduct a protracted defence or the shifting of reserves. It could also have a significant effect upon the mobilisation of reservists.

In a manner similar to the light infantry battalions, the brigades would augment the corps' reconnaissance assets, provide the primary forces for any envelopment or double envelopment attempted by the corps and have the capability to conduct extended operations deeper within ROK territory. A light infantry brigade is able to, and most likely would, detach units to operate beyond the corps area of operations.

The size of a light infantry or SPF unit employed against a specific target depends upon a number of considerations. They include the importance of the target, the type of target and the tactical situation. The fact that tactically unfavourable conditions exist does not preclude an attack. Quite the contrary, SPF units will conduct attacks under completely unfavourable tactical conditions, depending upon surprise, firepower and speed to offset such conditions. It should also be noted that these units will not hesitate to conduct attacks, if the target is important enough, that would be considered suicidal in other armies. The size of an attacking unit can range from a platoon to a battalion-plus.⁷

Airbase	Battalion +
Missile, C ³ I or radar site	Squad/platoon
Divisional-level command element	Platoon
Corps-level command element	Platoon/company
Field Army-level command element	Company/battalion
Bridge, tunnel, railway bridge, etc.	Squad
Government facilities (radio or TV station, telephone central office, etc.)	Squad/platoon

As regular ground forces advance, elements from the light infantry battalions and brigades will continually be pushed forward, seeking to destroy or disrupt ROK/US headquarters, C³I assets and lines of communication, always attempting to create the conditions necessary for envelopment.

Defensive operations

During defensive operations or withdrawals, light infantry units would operate as either a rear guard/delaying or stay-behind force. The rear guard/delaying force would harass ROK/US forces as they advance by conducting ambushes and destroying bridges, tunnels, power grids, telephone poles/towers, etc. The stay-behind force would attempt to establish guerrilla bands to harass ROK/US forces and provide intelligence to GHQ, corps or divisional commanders.

Notes

1 Defence Intelligence Agency. "North Korean Light Infantry and Reconnaissance Units", IAR-7-77, January 1978; Defence Intelligence Agency. "North Korean Special Purpose Forces", DDB-1100-475-84, May 1984; US Army. "North Korean Army Unconventional Warfare Capability", SRD-8-SC/NORFORN-76, 20 February 1976; and Bermudez Jr., Joseph S. "North Korea's Light Infantry Brigades", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Vol. 6, No. 19, 15 November 1986, pp. 1176-78.

2 As cited in *Foreign Report*. "North Korea's Temptation", 8 April 1982, No. 1723, p. 4.

3 One DIA report from the late 1970s postulates that a ranger/commando [i.e. light infantry] battalion has from 360 to 380 troops with subordinate companies of 50-70 men each. *North Korean Light Infantry and Reconnaissance Units*, p. 7.

4 Interestingly enough, the M16s have frequently had their serial numbers removed.

5 KPA encryption/decryption devices may, in part, be based upon older US technology, since the KPA seized such equipment (i.e. KW-7) aboard the USS Pueblo in 1968. "Coding Techniques are Detailed at Navy Spy Trial", *New York Times*, 27 March 1986, p. A23.

6 Pilots are considered primary targets for SPF operations since they are considerably more difficult to replace than aircraft.

7 "North Korean Special Purpose Forces", p. 4; and "North Korean People's Army Operations", pp. 17-18.

Chapter Seven

Amphibious light infantry brigades¹

“What is important is that we must come to the aid of the South Korean people whenever they request it, whatever the outcome of the war may turn out to be. We should be ready to respond to their call even if it comes tomorrow.”
—Kim Il-sung²

General

The origins of the KPA's amphibious light infantry brigades extend back to shortly before the Fatherland Liberation War when a general reorganisation of the Coast Guard headquarters occurred, resulting in the formation of the Korean People's Navy. During this reorganisation a number of marine infantry units were created and attached to the new navy headquarters. During the Fatherland Liberation War the majority of these units fought with distinction. The more prominent of these units included the 956th and 945th Independent Marine Regiments and the 766th Independent Unit.³

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s the KPA possessed only a limited capability to conduct small-scale amphibious operations. Such operations were launched along the east and west coasts of the ROK using fishing craft, junks, sanpans and a few conventional amphibious warfare craft. However, with the changing doctrine and the increased activities against the ROK during the mid-1960s, the KPA made a concerted effort to re-establish a viable amphibious warfare capability. This was accomplished by the acquisition of conventional amphibious warfare craft and the gradual reorganisation of the few amphibious-capable units with light infantry forces into an amphibious light infantry regiment. Personnel for this unit were apparently obtained by the disbandment of the GHQ-level 23rd Infantry Brigade (the redesignated 956th Independent Marine Regiment). KPA amphibious capabilities remained minimal until the mid-1970's, due to the small number of available amphibious warfare craft.⁴ The amphibious light infantry regiment gradually evolved into the present force of three amphibious light infantry brigades.⁵ The most recent changes involve the formation of two new battalions on the east coast, raising the total to 13. These brigades are trained in amphibious and unconventional warfare, and special operations. What distinguishes them from the other SPF brigades is their specialised amphibious warfare training, equipment and manner of employment.

The unique geographic and demographic characteristics of the Korean Peninsula all but ensure that the amphibious light infantry brigades would play a significant role in any future conflict. Some of the more salient of these characteristics include:

- Of the Korean Peninsula's 8,700km of coastline approximately 6,800km are within ROK territory. This long coastline is almost impossible to seal or defend completely.
- The Korean Peninsula is surrounded by more than 3,000 islands, the majority of which are similarly within ROK territory. These islands could provide shelter or forward bases of operations for assaulting or infiltrating amphibious light infantry units.
- The ROK's eastern and western coastal plains are quite narrow and vulnerable to interdiction (the eastern plain is 3-5km wide and the western plain is 15-20km wide). Most of the ROK's north-south lines of communication and strategic targets (both military and political) lie on these narrow coastal plains.

Missions

The primary mission of amphibious light infantry brigades is to conduct offensive amphibious and special operations along the ROK coast. They will engage in unconventional warfare operations as a secondary mission, as required. More specifically the amphibious light infantry brigades are tasked with the following offensive missions:

- The seizure, disruption or destruction of key installations within coastal areas.
- Assisting the advance of standard ground forces by enveloping coastal flanks.
- Assault landings to seize and control a beachhead to allow the landing of standard ground forces.
- Assisting standard ground forces during river crossing and bridging operations within coastal areas (e.g. the Han River estuary).
- The establishment of a new front within the ROK's strategic rear.
- Reconnaissance and special operations.

Amphibious light infantry brigades are also tasked with the following defensive missions:

- Security and defence operations within the strategic rear areas.
- Assisting base security units in the defence of KPN bases.
- Limited coastal/island defence operations.

These missions are roughly comparable to those of US Marine and SEAL forces or Soviet Naval Infantry and Naval Commandos. The amphibious light infantry brigades are neither trained nor equipped to force a landing against a heavily defended beach.

Command and control

Command and control of the amphibious light infantry brigades extends from the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces, through the General Staff Department and VIII Special Purpose Corps to the KPN Command Headquarters at Namp'o and its amphibious light infantry headquarters. The day-to-day administration of the KPN and the supervision of its operations are delegated to the Commander of Naval Forces. His directives are passed down

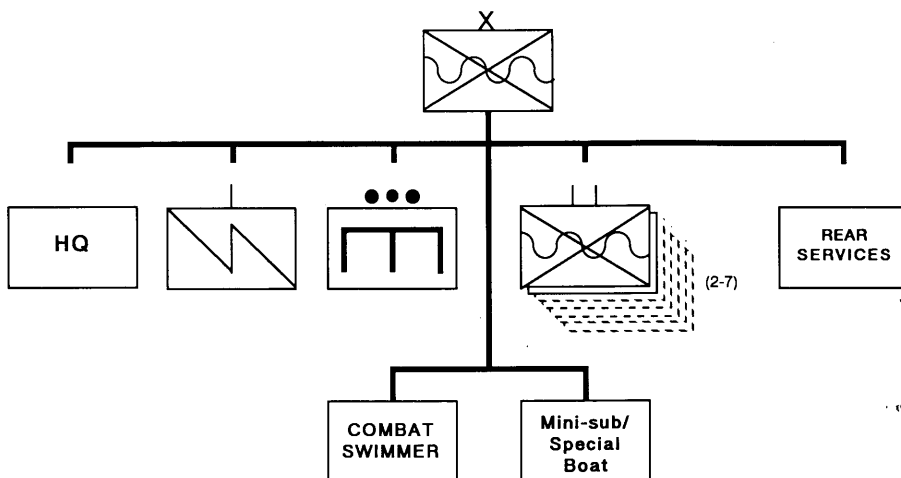
to the fleet and the amphibious light infantry brigades through the commanders of the "Yellow Sea" Fleet headquarters at Namp'o and the "East Sea" Fleet headquarters at Wonsan. The amphibious light infantry headquarters provides administrative and technical support.

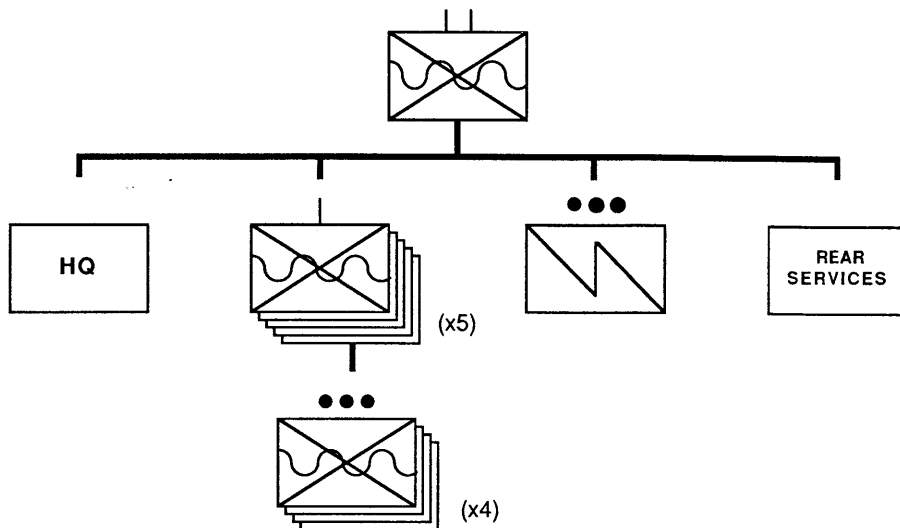
Organisation and equipment

The KPA's three amphibious light infantry brigades (13 battalions) and supporting headquarters and units have an aggregate personnel strength of 9,000. These three brigades are currently deployed with III Corps (at Hakkye, south of Namp'o and across the Taedong River), VII Corps (at Wonsan) and VIII Corps (at Tasa-ri). It should be noted that while the brigade headquarters and a majority of the subordinate battalions are deployed at these locations, a number of battalions are detached and located at other navy bases or facilities.

The organisation of the amphibious light infantry brigade is apparently derived from that of the light infantry brigade, although it is considerably smaller. It consists of a headquarters element, a signals company, an engineer platoon, two to seven battalions and a rear services element. The Wonsan brigade is organised with seven battalions, the Tasa-ri brigade with two battalions and the Hakkye brigade with four battalions. The Wonsan brigade is believed to have a personnel strength of 3,535-3,550 (295-300 officers and 3,240-3,250 enlisted), including a small number of women in rear services units. Three of the brigade's battalions are deployed at Ijin-dong (VI Corps), the remaining four around Wonsan. Although there is no hard evidence, each brigade organisation is also believed to contain a "combat swimmer" unit (similar in capabilities to Soviet Naval Commandos or US SEAL units) and a "mini-sub/special boat" unit (similar to the US SEAL Special Boat Units and SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams). Each battalion has a personnel strength of approximately 400 and is organised into a headquarters element, a signals platoon, five companies and a rear services element. Each company is organised into a headquarters element and four platoons.⁶

Amphibious light infantry brigade.





Amphibious light infantry battalion.

The KPA amphibious light infantry battalion is almost identical in size to a Soviet Naval Infantry battalion but is less than half the size of a US Marine infantry battalion, although, in both instances, it is considerably “lighter” in equipment.

- KPA amphibious light infantry bn 400
- Soviet Naval infantry bn 409
- US Marine infantry bn 867

The types of weapons and equipment likely to be held by an amphibious light infantry brigade are the same as those for a light infantry brigade, although they may also include:

- 120mm mortars which may replace the 60/82mm mortars.
- 107mm B-11 recoilless guns may replace the 82mm B-10.
- Engineer equipment (including flamethrowers, mine/obstacle breaching, etc.).
- The attachment of amphibious tanks and APCs (see below).
- Captured ROK/US weapons and equipment.
- Specialised infiltration craft, mini-submarines and delivery vehicles.⁷
- Specialised underwater equipment (SCUBA, etc.).

It is believed that amphibious light infantry brigade personnel receive amphibious warfare training at the Ijin-dong naval base on the east coast (VI Corps) and Tasa-ri on the west coast (VIII Corps).⁸ This is tentatively confirmed by the geography of the areas and the unusually large numbers of amphibious warfare craft based in these areas. In addition to this amphibious warfare training, it is believed that some amphibious light infantry brigade personnel may be airborne qualified.

Doctrine

KPA amphibious warfare doctrine is based upon experiences gained during

the Fatherland Liberation War both while conducting amphibious operations at the beginning of the war along the ROK east coast and later when conducting the November 1951-March 1952 "island-hopping" campaign along the west coast. Additional influence has been exerted by major UNC amphibious operations and small raids during the war, the lessons learned by the Soviet Union during the Second World War and the PRC experiences during the 1950s and early 1960s.⁹ The KPA has modified these experiences to meet its own unique requirements. KPA doctrine apparently divides amphibious operations into three broad categories: strategic, operational and tactical/special operations landings.

Strategic landings These are multi-brigade/battalion operations which are confined to targets of extreme military or political importance. In all likelihood, these operations would be limited either to the beginning phases of any new conflict or to when they are required as a strategic catalyst. They are not intended to be conducted independently but rather in co-ordination with other SPF or regular ground forces operations. Likely objectives for strategic operations include:

- Assisting the advance of regular ground forces along the coastal plains on the ROK's western coast by conducting landings in the Inch'on—P'yong'taek area or on the eastern coast by conducting landings in the Kangnung or Samch'ok areas.
- The seizure and control of vital geographic features such as the islands and straits along the ROK's west coast.
- The seizure and control of a beachhead as a first echelon to allow the landing of regular ground forces. Such operations would include the landing of small numbers of light tanks and APCs.
- The disruption, seizure or control of major naval bases, ports, airfields, etc. located within the coastal zone.
- The establishment of a new front within the ROK/US strategic rear.

Operational landings These are small-scale landings conducted by units of battalion, company or platoon strength. These operations would concentrate on raids, ambushes, reconnaissance and assaults at company or platoon strength. Battalion strength operations can be expected when the objectives are of considerable value. Although these operations may be conducted independently they will typically have the support of other SPF or regular ground force operations. These operations will have as objectives the following:

- The seizure or destruction of sensitive facilities (especially airbases, POL storage and mobilisation) within coastal areas.
- The interdiction, seizure or control of ROK/US operational/strategic lines of communication within the coastal areas.
- Assisting the advance of ground forces by outflanking or assisting in the encirclement or envelopment of ROK/US positions along the coasts.
- Combined operations with or in support of airborne light infantry and reconnaissance units landed deep within ROK territory.
- Pre-invasion beach reconnaissance, including the seizure of a beachhead in advance of an assault by other amphibious units.
- Deception operations.

Tactical/special operations landings These landings/operations, carried out during both peace and war, are conducted by units of company, platoon, squad

or team size, operating independently of other SPF or regular ground forces. Objectives for these operations include:

- The seizure or destruction of nuclear, chemical, C³I and missile sites within coastal areas.
- The destruction of ROK/US surface combatants, auxiliaries and civilian shipping located within ROK naval bases and ports.
- Seizure or destruction of strategic facilities (e.g. railway tunnels, dams, submarine telecommunications cables, nuclear and conventional power-plants).¹⁰
- Intelligence operations to seize documents, weapons or equipment.
- Assassination or abduction of important military or political personnel.
- Pre-invasion beach reconnaissance.
- Deception operations (typically conducted over a wide area).
- Raids against US theatre/global facilities (such as 5th Air Force airfields in Japan and on Okinawa, US bases at Subic Bay in the Philippines or Pearl Harbor in Hawaii).

Amphibious landing operations

Organisation The organisation and conduct of a strategic or battalion-sized operational amphibious landing are described below. Other landings would be similar but proportionally smaller and may include the following modifications: elimination of the “outer screen”, the “shore bombardment” force would double as a “coastal screen” and the landing force would consist solely of Namp’o class assault landing craft.

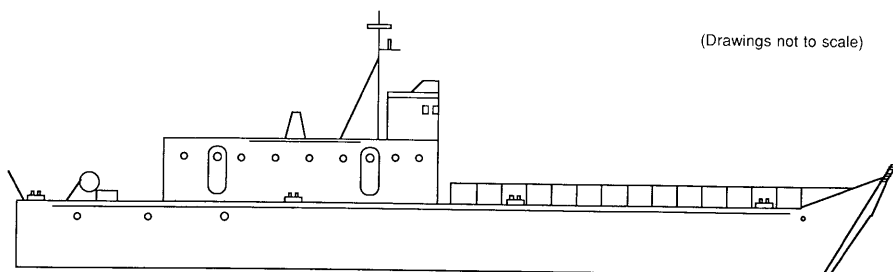
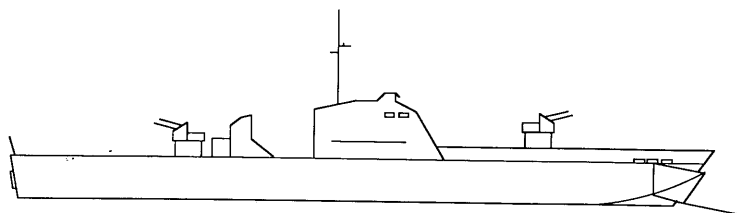
- Landing sites have to be selected in isolated coastal areas away from naval bases, ports and towns; consideration being given to the time required to arrive at the landing site, coastal defence measures, weather and tide conditions (which can vary as much as 10 metres in the Yellow Sea).
- The landing force, consisting of landing craft and amphibious light infantry brigade personnel, has to concentrate at forward naval bases.
- Prior to the actual landings, squad and platoon-sized units have to conduct beach reconnaissance and establish ambush positions, possibly with the assistance of reconnaissance and airborne light infantry units.
- Deception landings and raids may have to be conducted.
- The landing force embarks and is joined by an escort force. The combined invasion force, under the command of an “operations team”, is likely to be organised as follows;
 - **Outer screen.** Responsible for keeping the invasion fleet away from ROK/US surface combatants and scouting for the “inner screen”. It would consist of Romeo class patrol submarines.
 - **Inner screen.** Consists of fast attack craft—missile (Soju, Osa-1, So Hung, or Komar classes) which engage at long range any vessels that are sighted by or pass through the outer screen.
 - **Coastal screen.** Provides protection from any attacks originating from the shore along the invasion force’s line of approach. Additionally, it may be tasked with conducting pre-emptive raids against enemy naval facilities. It consists of fast attack craft—torpedo (I’won, P6, Sinp’o. Sin Hung, etc. classes).



Chinhae naval base, on the southern coast of the ROK, would be among the targets for pre-emptive raids by DPRK amphibious forces. (US Navy)

- **Escort force.** Composed of large patrol craft (Hainan, Taechong, etc. classes) and fast attack craft—gun (Chodo, Mo V, etc. classes) which provide limited anti-aircraft defence, deal with any enemy craft that penetrate the screening forces and provide limited fire support to ALIUs once they have landed.
- **Shore bombardment force.** Accompanies the landing force into the beach and provides fire support if required. It consists of fast attack craft—gun (Chano, Chung Jin, Chung Ju, Shanghai II, etc. classes).
- **Landing force.** Normally consists of at least two groups. The first group with Namp'o class LCPFs and the second or following waves with additional Namp'o and Hantae class LCMs or Hanchon class LCUs.
- The main bodies approach at night or under conditions of limited visibility; the actual landings being made at night or at first light.
- Company and battalion-sized units assault in the first wave and secure the beachhead, possibly with the assistance of amphibious light tanks and APCs.
- Upon landing, units assume frontages similar to those of ground forces with a battalion having a frontage of approximately 1000 metres. Battalion landing sites would be 800–1000 metres apart.
- Once the beachhead is secured, follow-on echelons could include standard ground force units, possibly reinforced with additional armour and artillery.

Command and Control Until such time as the amphibious light infantry brigade has established itself ashore, overall operational control of an amphibious operation is believed to be exercised by an "Operations Team" located at the respective fleet headquarters. This "Operations Team" also exercises control over the movements of all ships. This chain of command is awkward, to say the least, and reduces the status of the commander of the naval group and his subordinate captains to "conning" officers, manoeuvring their ships according to orders from base headquarters. Once the amphibious light infantry brigade has established itself ashore, control is transferred to the amphibious light infantry brigade commanders who are now directly subordinate to



Provisional drawings of (top) Namp'o-class LCPF and (above) Hanchon-class LCU.

VIII Special Purpose Corps or to the General Staff Department. This chain of command may possibly be modified if the landing force includes a Najin class frigate which may have a limited command and control capability.

Fire Support Fire support would only be employed when the landing force has been detected or when attacking areas known to be fortified or occupied by enemy units. In which case the escort and shore bombardment forces will provide traditional, albeit limited, naval fire support. The KPA would also make use of standard artillery units installed on nearby islands. Although, the primary mission of the KPAF is air defence, additional fire support may be available prior to a landing from a limited number of KPAF ground attack sorties. However, it is important to note that neither ground attack sorties nor air superiority are prerequisites for amphibious operations; most operations would be conducted without KPAF assistance. To coordinate fire support any amphibious landing may also include a fire support coordination team (similar to any US ANGLICO team).

Augmentation Depending on the size and location of a landing operation, the amphibious light infantry brigades may be augmented by attaching amphibious light tank, artillery and air defence elements. The KPA currently fields approximately four light tank battalions (amphibious) equipped with PT-76/Type-63 light tanks.¹¹ These battalions are apparently subordinated directly to the Armour Command headquarters but attached to I and II Corps (forward) to support amphibious operations along the east coast and the Han River estuary respectively and III Corps for coastal defence along the western coast. Attached artillery units would typically include 76.2/85mm guns or 120mm mortars; air defence units would be equipped with the ZPU-2/4 or ZU-23.

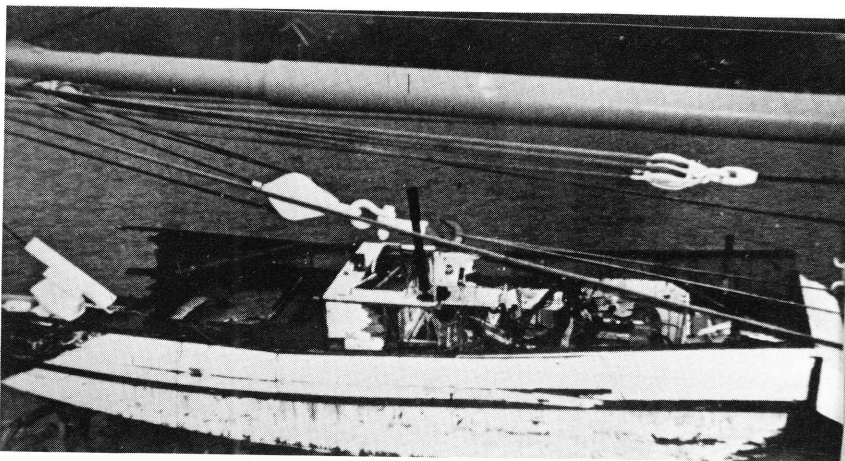
Special operations landings¹²

Special operations landings are not only made by small teams from the amphibious light infantry brigade for pre-landing reconnaissance, raids, etc., but are also employed to insert reconnaissance and KWP Liaison Department personnel. These landings are conducted by employing a wide variety of highly specialised infiltration craft and submarines. They can be divided into two categories based upon their distance from the port of embarkation: long-range and short-range.¹³ The primary means of transport for long-range special operations landings are submarines (SS), specialised "agent" transfer-ships and fishing or cargo ships. The infiltrating team embarks upon its transport at a major port or naval base, is transported to the general area of the landing site and then disembarks at sea. After disembarking, the teams proceed to shore using individual swimmer delivery devices, SCUBA equipment, small rafts or by swimming. Additionally, the specialised agent-transfer ships act as mother ships for specialised high-speed semi-submersible infiltration craft. The primary means of transport for short-range special operations landings (normally made on the ROK's west coast) are the high-speed semi-submersible infiltration craft and mini-submarines (SSm). In these landings the infiltrating team embarks in its infiltration craft or mini-submarine in a sheltered area along the DPRK coast and sails the craft to the landing site. Once at the landing site the high-speed semi-submersible infiltration craft is either taken right onto the beaches or is submerged a short distance offshore, the team swimming the rest of the way. The mini-submarines are submerged in shallow waters off shore and the team swims the remainder of the way. Alternatively, one member delivers the team and returns with the mini-submarine.

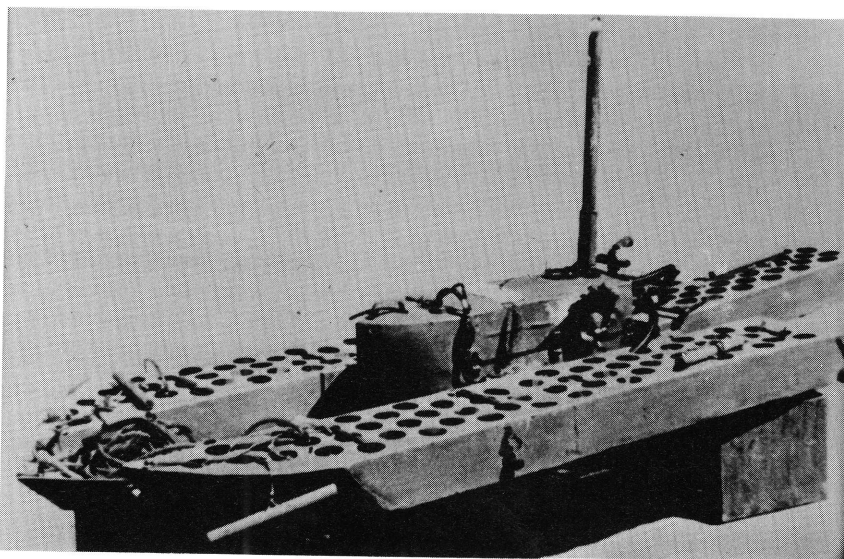
Infiltration craft normally proceed well out to sea to minimise the possibility of detection from ROK-held islands or by shore patrols, before turning south and making a high-speed approach toward the shore (normally under the cover of darkness or inclement weather). Just prior to landing, the team normally stops approximately 500 metres from the shore to evaluate the situation. If security is lax and the water is deep, the coast is approached rapidly. If the water is shallow, the landing is accomplished using individual swimmer delivery devices or small rafts. If the high-speed semi-submersible infiltration craft are being used, the engines are silenced approximately 200 metres from the landing site and the craft is paddled into shore. The team then conceals the infiltration craft/device/equipment and removes all traces of their presence.

The west coast of the ROK is generally more suitable for special operations landings as it has an irregular coastline and numerous offshore islands that render surveillance difficult while affording concealment for beach approaches. However, the extreme tidal range, as much as 32 feet (9.75m), and associated currents, coupled with shallow offshore gradients, constitute a major drawback along the west coast. Along the east coast, tides are not an inhibiting factor. The relatively straight coastline, while devoid of adequate cover, offers a wide choice of landing sites. The primary east coast embarkation port is Wonsan, while on the west coast it is Namp'o.

Related to amphibious special operations are the repeated sightings of white (grey?) high-speed craft in the Sea of Japan between Japan and the DPRK. While the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force has so far been unable to apprehend any of these craft, they are believed to be directly related to DPRK agent



Captured remains of a DPRK high-speed infiltration boat sunk by the ROKN off the southern coast of the Republic on 19 May 1978. (Bradley-Hahn Collection)



DPRK submersible capable of being dismantled and transported to the scene of operations by high-speed infiltration boats. (Bradley-Hahn Collection)

and SPF activities in Japan (which in this case also includes smuggling and drug trafficking).

Offensive operations

The ability of the KPA to employ the amphibious light infantry brigades is dependent upon the amphibious lift capabilities of the KPN. At present the KPN has approximately 102 amphibious warfare craft with a theoretical amphibious lift capacity of approximately 5,000 troops.¹⁴

Class	Type	Number	Est capacity	Est total lift capacity
Nampo	LCPF	80	20-30	1,600-2,400
Hantaе	LCM	12	160-200	1,920-2,400
Hanchon	LCU	10	40-60	400-600
Total		102		3,920-5,400

Although this theoretical amphibious lift capacity is slightly less than the combined personnel strength of the three amphibious light infantry brigades, it is highly unlikely that the KPA could, or would, commit the entire force at once during a conflict. Even if the KPA were to employ all three brigades simultaneously, the KPN would be unable to sustained them solely with over-the-beach resources.

In the event of renewed hostilities the probable employment of the amphibious light infantry brigades would include:

- One strategic landing on the west coast in the Inch'on—P'yong'taek area. This landing would be an effort to outflank and envelope both the capital city of Seoul and the ROK/US forces deployed along the DMZ. It would also represent a significant threat to the port of Inch'on and the 5th Air Force bases at Osan and Suwon, as well as the Suwon highway airstrip, P'yong'taek airport and the P'yong'taek highway airstrip. The losses or disruption of any of these facilities would have a significant effect on ROK/US air superiority, close air support and theatre reinforcement. Such a landing would be conducted in concert with a IV and II Corps (forward) attack towards Seoul and a V Corps (forward) attack to outflank the city. The V Corps attack would attempt to join up with the amphibious landing and complete a strategic envelopment of Seoul and ROK/US forces deployed north of the capital. The landing would also receive support from airborne light infantry and reconnaissance units.
- One or two operational landings on the east coast near Kangnung or Samch'ok to outflank and envelop ROK/US forces deployed along the eastern half of the DMZ and to isolate the northeast section of the ROK from the rest of the country. These landings would be conducted in conjunction with a I Corps (forward) thrust south along the coast and a V Corps (forward) attack south from the DMZ and then east to the coast.
- One or two operational landings on the west coast on Kanghwa-do or the Kimpo peninsula northwest of Seoul. These landings would not only threaten Seoul but outflank a significant segment of the defensive lines north of the city.
- Numerous tactical landings of company and platoon size and special operations against naval bases (i.e. P'ohang, Mukhojin-ni, Masan, Mokp'o), ports (i.e. Inch'on, Pusan), coastal airfields (i.e. Suwon, Osan, Kwangju, Kunsan) and important targets located in coastal areas (i.e. the P'ohang-Uijongbu "army petroleum distribution" pipeline or the Pusan—Uijongbu fibre-optics communication system).¹⁵ These operations would be conducted in co-operation with airborne light infantry and reconnaissance personnel.
- Special operations against US facilities in Japan (Yokota and Misawa airbases, etc.), The Philippines (Subic Bay), Okinawa (Kadena airbase), etc.

Strategic and operational landings are not necessarily limited to wartime operations. If the DPRK leadership believed that the political climate was favourable, it could once again institute a policy of limited escalation. Such escalation could mean strategic/operational landings attempting to seize the ROK island of Ullung-do or the UN-controlled islands of Yonp'yong-ni, Socheong-do, Daechong-do and Baegryeong-do. The KPA would then petition the UN for a truce. Such operations would place both the ROK and US Governments in extremely difficult positions. The ROK would have to either escalate and risk full-scale war by attempting to recapture the island(s), thereby incurring the wrath of a "peace-loving" world, or lose credibility by doing nothing. The United States of America would be in the awkward position of having to decide whether to be drawn into a costly conflict over a few small islands.

The KPA is also producing two classes of small submarines for use in special operations. The first class is a 41-metre "coastal" submarine, one of which is known to exist. The second class is a 3-ton, two or three-man, 5.7-metre "midget" submarine, of which five are known to have been commissioned and three were under construction in 1985.¹⁶ Production of this "midget" began during the mid-1960s, at least one has been captured by the ROKN and an unknown number are believed to have been exported to Iran during 1987.¹⁷ The KPN is also known to have been seeking to obtain small submarines from Western countries. When conducting special operations, amphibious light infantry brigade personnel have also employed "Zodiac" type powered rafts, rubber rafts, rowing boats and kayaks, specially modified civilian fishing vessels and indigenously designed and produced swimmer-delivery vehicles. The latter include two types of semi-submersible infiltration craft, explosive boats and small individual infiltration devices.¹⁸ This domestic production of small submarines and infiltration craft is an excellent indicator of the importance the KPA attaches to amphibious special operations.

Amphibious order of battle 1983¹

Naval base	Amphibious vessels				Submarines			
	LCPF	LCU	LCM	Total	SSc	SSm	SS	Total
West Sea Fleet:								
Tasa-ri	23	—	—	23	—	—	—	—
Namp'o	11	—	10	21	—	—	—	—
Pipagot	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	5
Ch'o-do	—	—	8	8	—	—	—	—
Sagot	9	2	4	15	—	1	—	1
East Sea Fleet:								
Ijin-dong	20	2	—	22	1	—	—	1
Ch'ongjin	6	—	—	6	—	—	—	—
Kimchaek	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	—
Chaho	—	2	2	4	—	—	4	4
Mayang-do	5	2	4	11	—	—	10	10
Wonsan	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	—
Changjun	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	5
Total	74	10	30	114	1	6	19	26

Amphibious order of battle 1971²

Naval base	Amphibious vessels				Submarines			
	LCPF	LCU	LCM	Total	SSc	SSm ³	SS	Total
West Sea Fleet:								
Namp'o	—	—	9	9	—	—	—	—
Sagon-ni	—	1	2	3	—	—	—	—
East Sea Fleet:								
Najin	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Kimchaek	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Chaho	—	1	1	2	—	—	2	2
Sinp'o	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	—
Mayang-do	—	1	—	1	—	—	2	2
Wonsan	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Total	?	5	15	20 +	?	?	4	4 +

1 "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Maritime Power", pp. 10–19. 2 "North Korean Navy: Compact, Capable, Growing", p. 5. 3 Ibid.; this source makes no mention of KPN "mini" or "coastal" submarines, yet it is known that the ROKN captured one in 1965. It is probable that by 1971 the KPN had more of these vessels.

Defensive operations

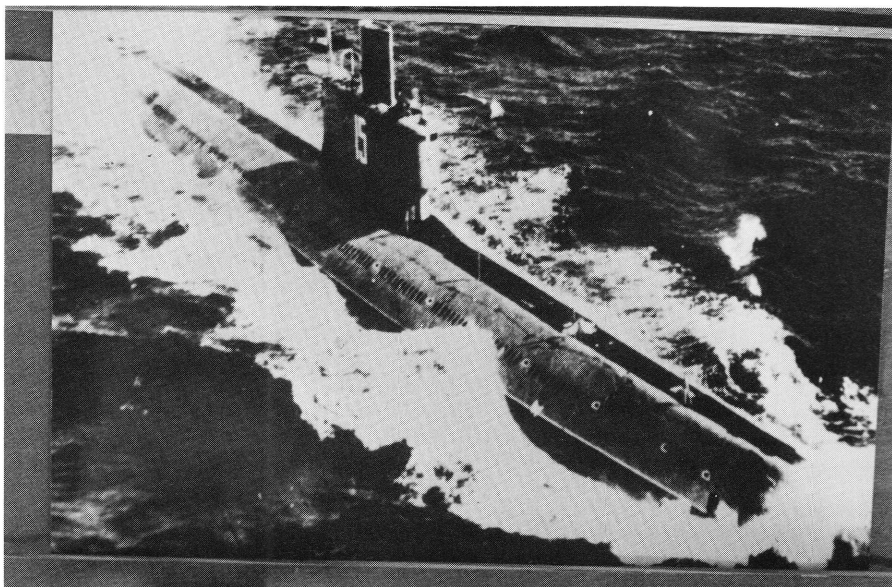
The ability of the amphibious light infantry brigades to conduct effective defensive operations when deployed within the ROK/US rear is severely limited by the absence of heavy weapons and their dependence on extraordinary means of logistic support. This is especially true when defending against an armoured or combined-arms attack. If forced into an untenable defensive situation, amphibious light infantry brigade personnel are likely to either attempt exfiltration to form small guerrilla units behind enemy lines or to fight to the bitter end.¹⁹

During defensive operations within the DPRK the amphibious light infantry brigade may participate in coastal defence operations in defence of naval bases, ports and islands and the construction and manning of beach defences and obstacles. During defensive operations these units may also be employed as standard light infantry units.

Global operations

Besides its traditional amphibious warfare fleet the DPRK possesses a significant theatre/global amphibious lift capability in the KPN's 16 Whiskey and 4 Romeo-class submarines and its merchant marine fleet, which includes approximately 61 ocean-going vessels.²⁰ While both classes of submarine are old, they are capable of inserting and supporting small amphibious light infantry brigade teams anywhere in the southwest Pacific (and conceivably even Hawaii and the US mainland).

The KPA has a long history of employing its civilian merchant fleet for special operations, such as the attempted landing of 25 June 1950 northeast of



DPRK Romeo-class submarine operating off the east coast of North Korea. (Bradley-Hahn Collection)

Pusan, the continued use of small coastal vessels to insert agents along the ROK coastline, the employment of the "Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho" to transport three members of a reconnaissance brigade to Rangoon for the 9 October 1983 assassination attempt on ROK President Chun Doo Hwan (see Chapter Nine: Reconnaissance brigades) and the attempt to establish a SIGINT/ELINT post in the Gulf of California.

The "Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho" is a DPRK merchant ship which has been frequently employed to support KPA special operations throughout Asia.²¹ According to US intelligence sources, it is the only merchant ship in the world that has been identified as an engine of state-sponsored terrorism.²² It first came to the public's attention in October 1983 when it was employed to transport the three would-be assassins to Rangoon. The ship's rescue mission was aborted with the subsequent capture of these reconnaissance brigade personnel and the ship returned to the DPRK in November. During 1985, the "Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho" made two voyages to Japan, the first during the early summer and the second on 14 August when it remained for three days. What was particularly disconcerting about both these visits was that the crew manifest disclosed that a majority of the approximately 31 crew members, including most of the key officers, were members of the crew which had participated in the 1983 Rangoon voyage.²³

In assessing the operations of the "Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho", US intelligence sources concluded that it had a "history of involvement in North Korean agent and smuggling activities in Japan and possibly other Asian countries", it has been "equipped with sophisticated communications devices, heavy machine guns, small firearms, grenades, a larger than normal crew and special 'training' facilities." The ship had undergone "periodic subordination" to the KWP for special operations "while disguised as a trade ship." It had most likely become "part of the North Korean merchant marine (which) was recently



The merchant ship Am Nok Gang is typical of the apparently innocent vessels used by the DPRK for infiltration purposes. (FotoFlite)

organised into "suicide squads" in order to become the fourth defensive force of North Korea."²⁴

KPA use of its merchant fleet is apparently not confined to only a few ships. In January 1982, Captain Kang Dokun of the "Changsan-ho", a 14,000-ton DPRK merchant ship, defected when his ship became grounded in the approaches to the Straits of Malacca. The grounding necessitated immediate hull repairs to make the vessel seaworthy. Captain Kang Dokun feared that he would be punished when he returned home. He claimed that his ship was one of 27 ocean-going merchant vessels, ranging in size from 3,000 to 20,000 tons, supporting international terrorist activities and that his ship had made a series of voyages since December 1980 delivering arms, ammunition and supplies clandestinely to leftist guerrillas in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.²⁵

An interesting aspect of the DPRK's involvement in the Middle East has been the purchase and resale of Chinese-produced HY-2 Silkworm coastal defense missiles to the Government of Iran, allowing the Chinese Government to deny that it is selling arms to Iran. The US has taken the Silkworm threat, and the DPRK's transfer of these missiles, so seriously that during January 1 1988 it considered intercepting DPRK cargo vessels transiting to Iran.²⁶

One of the most intriguing incidents concerning KPA global special purpose operations was the 1983 attempts to conduct SIGINT/ELINT operations and possibly establish a SIGINT/ELINT post in the Gulf of California.²⁷

During January 1983 at least four DPRK "shrimping trawlers" entered the Gulf of California. One vessel of DPRK registry, but flying a Mexican flag, proceeded north towards St Jorge Bay, off the town of Rocky Point, where it remained at anchor for approximately one week. The ship identified by US intelligence sources as the "Clomax 71" was seized by Mexican authorities on 21 January for "fishing illegally in the gulf". However, US intelligence sources indicate that it was being used to conduct SIGINT/ELINT operations and to supply secret terrorist training camps established in the remote areas of northern Baja California and in the mountains around Culiacan, Sinaloa, in central Mexico. These sources further stated that the ship was "bristling with

antennas" and had a crew of 28 DPRK and seven Mexican nationals. The Mexicans all carried false passports while the Koreans were believed to have been "soldiers or commandos" involved in training Central American terrorists and revolutionaries.²⁸

Later, in May 1983, another DPRK ship reportedly attempted to establish a SIGINT/ELINT position on the small island of San Ildefonso in the Gulf of California. Equipment deployed on the island included radio-monitoring and communications devices which were allegedly powerful enough to allow direct communication with the DPRK. All this equipment was removed when it was feared that security had been compromised. Such a position would have allowed the interception of US communications with Central America and communications emanating from a host of important US military facilities located in southern California and Arizona.²⁹ The information gathered by these operations was allegedly supplied to the Sandinista Government among others.

US intelligence sources indicate that DPRK intelligence-gathering ships have maintained a significant presence in the Gulf of California since early 1982.³⁰

These SIGINT/ELINT operations are not isolated incidents connected solely with North/Central America. DPRK ships are also reported to have been operating in the Arabian Gulf during the summer of 1987 providing "early warning, long-range reconnaissance and targeting data to the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps]".³¹

Notes

1 Defense Intelligence Agency. "North Korean Navy: Compact, Capable, Growing", *Defense Intelligence Digest*, November 1971, pp. 4-7; Defense Intelligence Agency. "North Korean Special Purpose Forces", DDB-1100-475-84, May 1984; US Army. "North Korean Army Unconventional Warfare Capability", SRD-8-SC/NORFORN-76, 20 February 1976; US Army. "North Korean People's Army Operations", FC 100-2-99, 5 December 1986; Bermudez Jr., Joseph S. "North Korean Marines", *Marine Corps Gazette*, January 1987, pp. 32-35.

2 Kim Il-sung, "Concluding Speech at the 4th Expanded Plenum of the 4th Choson People's Army Party Congress (6-14 January 1969), cited in: Choi Young, p. 345.

3 The 766th Independent Unit and 956th Independent Marine Regiment, more than any other units, exhibited the attributes of the present day amphibious light infantry brigades. They are also the units from which the amphibious light infantry brigades can directly draw their lineage. See Appendix B for more detailed unit histories on these and other units.

4 In 1971 the KPN possessed only 20 amphibious warfare craft (5 LCUs and 15 LCMs).

5 These units are variously referred to as "Maritime Escort Units", "Amphibious Assault Light Infantry Brigades", "Marine Regiments" or "Naval Infantry Regiments".

6 Although this is the current organisation of the amphibious light infantry force, it is believed that this force was previously organised into one brigade of 10 battalions, and then later into two brigades of five battalions each (one brigade assigned to each coast). Additionally, the current battalion organisation may also include a mortar battery.

7 These may be under the administrative or operational control of the KPN.

8 Amphibious warfare training may also be conducted in the Sinp'o Naval Base/Mayang-do area.

9 At their peak during the Second World War, Soviet Naval Infantry forces totalled "... over 350,000 troops in 40 brigades, six independent regiments and a number of smaller units. Five of these brigades were honoured with the 'Guards' distinction. Soviet accounts of the war indicate that there were 114 landings carried out by these troops during the war." Zaloga, Steven J. and Loop, James W. *Soviet Bloc Elite Forces*, Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1985. For a discussion on Communist Chinese experiences during the 1950s and early 1960s see: Muller Jr., David G. *China as a Maritime Power*, Westview Press, 1983.

10 An indication of the KPA interest in these targets was the unsuccessful raid against the ROK nuclear powerplant at Wolsung, approximately 40km east of Kyonju in Kyongsang Pukto, on 5 August 1983. This raid was conducted by a four-man amphibious light infantry team. Hahn, Bradley. "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Maritime Power", *Combat Craft*, January/February 1985, p. 16.

11 The structure of these light tank battalions (amphibious) is uncertain. It is believed to be similar to the standard tank battalion but has 31 PT-76/Type-63 light tanks and a personnel strength of 161 (20 officers and 131 enlisted men). The 31 tanks are distributed: one for the battalion commander and ten tanks each for the three companies. Each tank company has one tank for the commander and three platoons of three tanks each.

12 "North Korean Infiltration Raises Specter of Insurgency", pp. 4-6.

13 These categories are not absolutes but rather reflect an analysis of known operations.

14 Defence Intelligence Agency. Unclassified Communist Order of Battle, DDB-1200-124-86, April 1986, pp. 22-23; and Baker III, A.D. "Combat Fleets of the World 1986/87", Naval Institute Press, pp. 316-17.

15 For a description of the P'ohang-Uijongbu "army petroleum distribution" system see "Expanding the Line", Wegmann, Captain Robert E. "Expanding the Line", *Army Logistician*, March-April 1984, p. 27. For a description of the Pusan-Uijongbu fibre-optics communication system see Adelsberger, Bernard J. "Army Fibre-Optic Project Doubles Communication", *Army Times*, 18 May 1987, p. 33.

16 "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Maritime Power", p. 13; and Baker III, p. 316. The KPN has lost at least two of these "midgets", including the one captured by the ROKN.

17 The ROKN captured a KPN "midget" submarine on 5 July 1965 when it became grounded on a mudflat during a receding tide at the confluence of the Imjin and Han Rivers. For information on the possible export of these submarines to Iran see: Almond, Peter. "That Iran Sub, If Real, May Be N. Korean Model", *Washington Times*, 7 August 1987. This submarine is believed to be similar to the US Navy's Mk VII Mod 2 Swimmer Delivery Vehicle (SDV). For a description of US Navy SEAL SDVs see "SEAL Subs," *Gung-Ho Special No 4: US Navy SEALs*, 1985, pp. 50-57.

18 These semi-submersible infiltration craft are similar to the Submarine Products Ltd Excalibur/Excalibur 180 series of surface/submarine craft. "Excalibur 180 Surface/Submarine Craft", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 9 January 1988, p. 20.

19 KPA seaborne infiltrators have consistently demonstrated a willingness to kill themselves (typically having large quantities of plastic explosives strapped to their bodies) rather than risk capture.

20 Hahn, p. 13; and Baker III, p. 316.

21 The construction of the 'Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho' was financed by funds raised by the large community of DPRK nationals and sympathisers living in Japan. "Details of Bombing revealed in Confession", p. 4.

22 Anderson, Jack. "US Agents keeping Close Eye on North Korean Terrorist Ship", *Florida Today*, 16 October 1985, p. 11A.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 "Kang Dokhun news conference", *Korea Herald*, 15 February 1987.

26 Cushman Jr., John H. "U.S. Studied Halting Iran-Bound Missiles", *New York Times*, 18 January 1988, p. A6. The 'Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho' has not been involved in Silkworm operations at all, being used primarily for covert special operations.

27 Seper, Jerry. "N. Korean Ship Seizure off Mexico described by Valley Businessman", *Republic* [Phoenix Arizona], 5 June 1984, pp. B1 & B6; Seper, Jerry. "N. Korean Spy Ship Tried to establish Base on Gulf Island", *Republic* [Phoenix Arizona], 7 June 1984, pp. B1 & B8; and *The Tribune* [San Diego]. "N. Korean Ships reported Spying off Baja Coast", 6 June 1984, p. A3.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 The connection, if there is any, between DPRK and Soviet SIGINT/ELINT operations along the western and southern US borders, is unknown.

31 Bodansky, Yossef, Bruce, James and Banks, Tony. "Iran exercised confrontation with US forces", *Jane's Defence Weekly* Vol. 8, No. 4, 1 August 1987, p. 168.

Chapter Eight

Airborne light infantry brigades¹

"Oh they'll come all right, and they'll be coming by air" — ROKA officer

General

During the Fatherland Liberation War, the KPA was impressed by the capability of UNC forces to conduct small but effective airborne operations and to supply units by air. Although unable to develop an airborne capability during the years immediately following the armistice, limited parachutist training was initiated during the early 1960s and by 1968 at least two airborne units had been raised. These airborne units were apparently formed from a cadre of personnel drawn from the 17th Reconnaissance Brigade or the 17th underwent a gradual process of being reconstituted as the 17th Airborne Light Infantry Brigade.² The ability to employ these units effectively was severely limited by the KPAF's transport capability which then consisted of one consolidated transport/utility unit (26 aircraft including six An-2 Colt and eight Li-2 Cab transports and 12 Mi-4 Hound helicopters) directly subordinate to KPAF Command HQ.³ The ROK's subsequent fortification of the DMZ, which restricted ground infiltration, was a significant factor in the expansion of the airborne capabilities and the activation of new airborne units.



Antonov An-2 Colt of the kind used by the DPRK for low-speed, low-level infiltration.

By the early 1970s a number of new units had been activated and training and capabilities were enhanced by the acquisition of additional transport aircraft and helicopters. These units also trained in the use of hot-air balloons and are said to have attempted to infiltrate by this means. These airborne forces continued to expand throughout the 1970s and by the early 1980s the number of such brigades had reached its present level of eight. Training during the 1980s was expanded to include special operations with sailplanes and ultralights.

Missions

The missions assigned to the airborne light infantry brigades are essentially the same as those of the amphibious light infantry brigades. However, they will tend be conducted within the interior of the ROK's strategic rear and have a different order of priority (i.e. airbase assault and unconventional warfare appear to be major missions). The airborne light infantry brigades are also tasked with the:

- Support of amphibious landings.
- Establishment of a new front within the ROK's strategic rear.

In addition to the above, the airborne light infantry brigade, normally in cooperation with amphibious light infantry and reconnaissance brigade personnel, would be employed to conduct special operations like the seizure or destruction of strategic/theatre C³I, missile, radar and NBC warfare installations. These operations may be conducted throughout the entire ROK including the FEBA. The airborne light infantry brigades are also a vital part of the KPA's strategic reserves and are tasked with the following defensive missions:

- Security and defence operations within the strategic rear areas. These operations include counter-airborne operations and providing guidance and training in counter-guerrilla operations to regular army and paramilitary reserve units.⁴
- Assisting airfield security units in the defence of KPAF bases.
- Internal security operations for the protection of the DPRK Government.

These missions and the capabilities of the airborne light infantry brigades approach those of US airborne and ranger forces and Soviet airborne and *Raydoviki*, although they are by no means as heavily equipped as any of these units; in addition, they have a guerrilla/counter-guerrilla training role as part of their unconventional warfare mission.

Command and control

Command and control for airborne light infantry brigades, like that of the amphibious light infantry brigades, is not entirely clear. It extends from the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces, through the General Staff Department and VIII Special Purpose Corps to the individual airborne light infantry brigades. The nature of the airborne light infantry operations, however, requires that these units work closely with the KPAF which provides transportation and logistical support for all airborne/airmobile operations. The extent of the

control, if any, exercised by KPAF Command Headquarters over the airborne light infantry brigades is unknown. Additional administrative and technical support is provided by the General Staff Department's Reconnaissance Bureau, KWP Liaison Department, General Political Bureau and the Political Security Department. It is believed that due to the airborne light infantry brigades theatre level and special operations capabilities they maintain a closer affiliation with these organisations than do the light infantry and amphibious light infantry brigades.

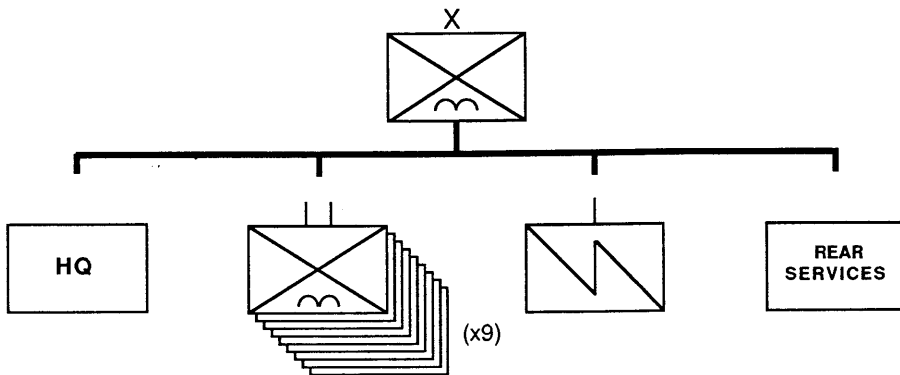
Organisation and equipment

The KPA's eight airborne light infantry brigades have a total personnel strength of 29,000–30,000. These brigades are presently deployed as follows: III Corps—two; VI Corps—one; VII Corps—one; VIII Corps—two; and IX Corps—two. It should be noted that while the brigade headquarters and a majority of its subordinate battalions are deployed within these corps; not all subordinate battalions are garrisoned in the same location. Moreover, a direct relationship between airborne light infantry units and airfields (or airfields of a specific type) has yet to become evident. Many of these units are located near jet fighter bases, while some are further away. Some units are located near transport airfields, while a few are located near highway strips. Nor has any direct relationship between airborne light infantry units and helicopters, sailplanes, ultralights or hot-air balloons become evident, other than the fact that some airborne light infantry units train in their use.

The organisation of the individual airborne light infantry brigade is believed to be quite similar to that of the light infantry brigade with the addition of requisite parachute rigging and airborne supply components. The brigade has a personnel strength of approximately 3,900 men and is organised into a headquarters element, a signals company, an engineer platoon, nine airborne light infantry battalions and a rear services element which includes parachute rigging and airborne supply. Each battalion has a personnel strength of approximately 400 and is organised into a headquarters element, a signals platoon, six companies and a rear services element.⁵ Each company is organised into a headquarters element and four platoons. The platoons are believed to consist of three squads each. The battalion is the tactical unit normally employed for independent operations although companies, platoons and even squads are also capable of independent operations. Each headquarters is believed to include an air-liaison element which is responsible for co-ordinating all supporting air operations (insertion, exfiltration, re-supply and ground support).

The KPA airborne light infantry battalion is significantly larger than comparable Soviet air assault/air mobile battalions yet smaller than PRC or US airborne infantry or air assault infantry battalions. In all instances the KPA battalion is considerably "lighter" in equipment.

- Soviet air mobile bn 250
- Soviet air assault bn (BMD) 312
- KPA airborne light infantry bn 400
- PRC airborne bn 605
- US airborne infantry bn 687
- US air assault infantry bn 733



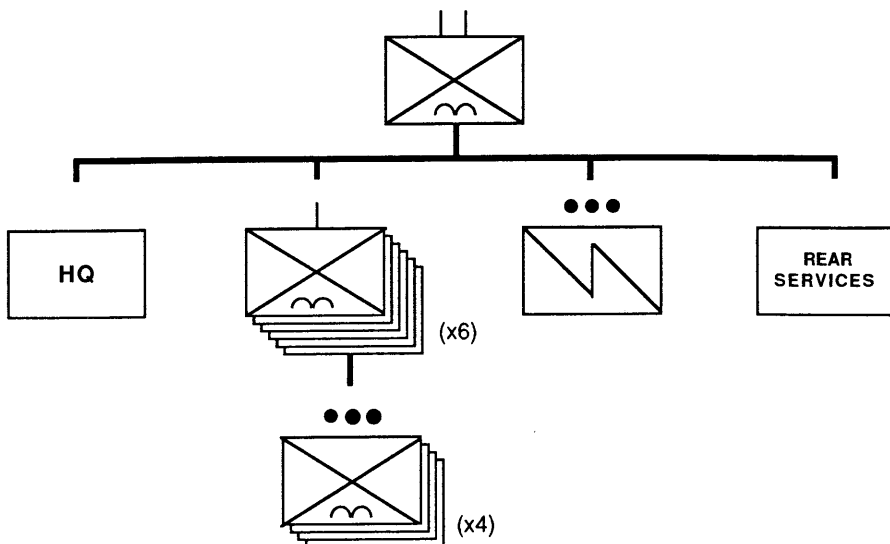
Airborne light infantry brigade.

The types of weapons likely to be found within the airborne light infantry brigades are the same as those for the standard light infantry brigade although they may also include:

- Crew-served weapons (76.2/85mm guns, ZU-23, ZPU-2/4, 120mm mortars) when the mission requires them and the airlift capabilities are available.
- A larger number of ATGMs.
- Sophisticated long-range communications equipment.
- The extensive use of any captured enemy weapons and equipment.

Airborne/airmobile training is known to be conducted in at least two known locations: Taechon and P'yongyang East airfields and airborne training facilities.⁶ It is believed that a small component of each brigade is qualified in

Airborne light infantry battalion.



HALO (High Altitude Low Opening) and HAHO (High Altitude High Opening) operations.

Doctrine

Although KPA airborne doctrine is heavily based upon Soviet doctrine, it is believed to have been influenced by the airborne operations conducted by UNC forces during the Fatherland Liberation War and the PRC use of XV Airborne Corps during the January 1967 "Wuhan Incident".⁷ The KPA has taken this body of experience and doctrine and modified it to meet their own unique requirements. This doctrine apparently divides airborne operations (as they do amphibious operations) into three broad categories: strategic, operational and tactical/special operations.

Strategic operations These are brigade/multi-battalion operations which would be confined to targets of extreme military or political importance. In all likelihood they would be limited either to the beginning phases of any new conflict or to when they are needed as a strategic catalyst. They are not intended to be conducted independently but rather in co-ordination with other SPF or regular ground force operations. Likely missions for strategic operations include:

- Combined operations in support of strategic amphibious landings.
- Assisting the advance of corps-level units by outflanking or assisting in the double envelopment of ROK/US positions.
- The establishment of a new front within the ROK's strategic rear.
- The seizure and control of vital geographic regions/features (mountain passes), cities and economic facilities (nuclear and hydroelectric power-plants) throughout the ROK's strategic rear.

Operational operations These operations are conducted by units of battalion, company or platoon strength. They concentrate on raids, ambushes, assaults and reconnaissance in company or platoon strength. Battalion strength operations can be expected when the objectives are of considerable value. Although these operations may be conducted independently of other SPF or regular ground forces operations, they would normally have such support. Objectives for operational operations include:

- The seizure or destruction of ROK/US airfields, C³I facilities and other sensitive facilities within the strategic rear.
- Combined operations with or in support of other SPF units such as the seizure of a beachhead in advance of an assault by amphibious light infantry units.
- Assisting the advance of ground forces by outflanking or assisting in the double envelopment of enemy positions.
- Assisting the advance of ground forces by seizing bridges, river crossing points and other important terrain features.
- The interdiction, seizure or control of ROK/US strategic/theatre-level lines of communication.
- Deception and unconventional warfare operations.

Tactical/special operations These cover a wide range of missions and would be conducted by units of company, platoon, squad or section size. These opera-

tions are frequently conducted independently of other SPF and regular ground force units. They will have as objectives:

- The destruction or capture of selected sensitive targets, especially nuclear, chemical, C³I and missile assets.
- Maintaining pressure on retreating ROK/US forces.
- Intelligence operations to seize enemy documents, weapons or equipment.
- Assassination or abduction of important military or political personnel (typically in co-operation with reconnaissance brigade personnel).
- Deception operations (normally conducted over a wide area).

Airborne lift capability

The KPAF currently possesses approximately 419 transport aircraft and helicopters capable of conducting airborne operations. These have a theoretical capability to airlift a total of 5,000–6,000 troops. However, this figure is extremely optimistic as it assumes that all possible aircraft (including VIP transports) and helicopters would be committed to this mission, a 100% “in service” rate would be achieved and that ROK/US forces would not have air superiority, highly unlikely scenarios!

Aircraft*	Est.⁸ number	Est. capacity	Est. total lift capacity	NATO reporting name
An-2**	250	9–13	2,250–3,250	Colt
An-24	10	60	600	Coke
Il-14	5	27–32	135–160	Crate
Il-18	4	122	488	Coot
Il-62	1	140–175	140–175	Classic
Tu-154B	2	96	192	Careless
Mi-4	40	12–16	480–640	Hound
Mi-8	20	24	480	Hip
MD 500D/E ⁹	86	4–6	344–516	
Total		419	5,111–6,501	

*Unconfirmed reports indicate that the KPAF received about 60 mi-2 Hoplite helicopters from Poland during the early 1980s.

**Most of these are actually Chinese-produced C-2s.

A more realistic estimate would be that the KPAF can lift 2,000–3,000 troops which could be employed anywhere on the Korean Peninsula. Although, even at this lower level it is doubtful that the KPAF could support them solely with air assets.

The threat from the airborne light infantry brigades is increased by the fact that the An-2 Colt is their primary transport. The An-2 is a single-engined multi-purpose biplane which first went into production in 1947. The aircraft normally cruises at 160 to 200km/h (100 to 125mph) and has a 550km operating radius with a normal payload of 9 passengers or 1,020kg. The An-2 is, however, capable of slower speeds (to 92km/h [57mph]) and more payload (up to 13 passengers) if required.¹⁰ Instead of the An-2's age and low speed being a drawback they are actually an asset, since these aircraft can fly below the mountaintops down the valleys leading from the DPRK to the ROK and thus

escape detection by ROK air defence radars. Airborne light infantry personnel would then parachute into military installations to wreak as much destruction as possible from within.¹¹ To counter this threat the USAF began a programme during 1985 to modify the radars on its E-3 AWACS aircraft to track the slow/low flying An-2.¹² However, even with this modification it is unlikely that a majority of the An-2s could be detected and it's even less likely that these could be intercepted effectively by ROKAF/USAF aircraft.¹³

Primary objectives of the airborne light infantry brigades are ROK/US airfields. In this context it is important to note that all of the 109 active ROK airfields, including Cheju International (on Cheju Island, 473km from the DMZ) are within the operating radius of the An-2. See pages 110-20 for a full listing of all ROK and DPRK airfields.

The recent KPAF acquisition of approximately 87 MD 500D/E helicopters has had a significant effect upon the ability of the KPAF and airborne light infantry brigades to conduct special operations. The MD 500D/Es are civilian versions of the Hughes 500MD Defender anti-tank helicopters used in large numbers by the ROKAF. The KPAF has armed and painted these helicopter in ROKAF colours. SPF units are actively training with these helicopters and have sometimes conducted this training near the DMZ with occasional penetrations of ROK airspace. Another recent acquisition since at least 1981 has been the importing of Soviet sports sailplanes manufactured in the city of Arsenyev, north of Vladivostok. ROK sources indicate that the DPRK does not engage in sailplane sports and that these sailplanes have been used to train "members of the Airborne Infiltration Brigade under the Special 8th Corps".¹⁴ Airborne training has been expanded since the early 1980s and now includes airborne, airmobile, sailplane, ultralight and hot-air balloon operations.

Airdrops/air landings would normally be conducted at dawn, dusk or at night and under unfavourable weather conditions. On rare occasions, however, they may be conducted during daylight hours (when conducting special operations or when employing MD 500D/E helicopters for airfield assaults. A typical dropping zone for an airborne light infantry battalion would be 1,000-2,000 metres wide and 2,000-3,000 metres long. Suitable locations include airfields, golf courses, sports fields, parks, etc. An air-landing zone for the An-2 Colt is usually a minimum of 30 metres wide and 350 metres long (highways make excellent air-landing zones) while that for Mi-4/8 helicopters would be a circle 50 metres in diameter.¹⁵ The estimated times to airdrop an airborne light infantry unit into a single dropping zone are:

Unit	Daytime	Night time
Battalion	30-45mins	45-90mins
Company	10-15 "	15-30 "
Platoon	5-10 "	10-15 "

Airborne light infantry operations employing sailplanes, ultralights or hot-air balloons as a primary means of transportation will be rare, due to the limited load-carrying capabilities of these craft and their sensitivity to weather conditions. These craft are however useful for some types of infiltration and reconnaissance missions thanks to their minimal radar signatures.

Airfields—Republic of Korea

Designation alt. designation(s)	Location	Altitude (ft)	Runway dimensions, surface type (ft)	Approx distance to DMZ (km)	Comments
R-162	38.02N, 126.55E	90	1,800 × 90 Earth	5	
R-107 Tongjin	37.43N, 126.34E	45	1,500 × 80 Asphalt	6	
R-321	38.16N, 127.33E	900	2,200 × 60 Earth	7	
Mandumi	38.00N, 126.55E	98	1,700 × 60 Earth	7	Runway dimensions are estimated.
R-430	37.24N, 129.13E	8	2,280 × 90 Earth	8	
R-238	38.10N, 127.06E	262	1,700 × 70 Earth	10	
R-240	38.14N, 127.23E	630	1,800 × 60 Earth	10	
R-225	38.01N, 126.59E	100	1,760 × 60 Earth	11	
R-412	38.14N, 128.12E	950	2,400 × 70 Earth	11	
R-110	37.45N, 126.47E	65	1,700 × 70 Asphalt	12	
R-129	37.57N, 126.55E	115	1,400 × 50 Earth	12	
R-317 Sabanggeri	38.12N, 127.39E	750	1,700 × 50 Earth	12	
R-239	38.11N, 127.13E	630	1,970 × 60 Earth	13	

R-226	38.01N, 127.02E	226	1,700 × 60 Earth	14	
R-316	38.12N, 127.25E	803	1,400 × 60 Earth	15	Second earth runway, 1,400 × 60.
R-413 Gan Sung	38.23N, 128.28E	20	2,600 × 70 Earth	17	
R-227	38.01N, 126.06E	220	1,500 × 90 Earth	18	
R-237 Chipo-ri	38.09N, 127.19E	510	3,800 × 70 Earth	18	
R-228 Camp St. Barbara	38.01N, 127.08E	228	1,900 × 60 Asphalt	19	Also known as Backeuri.
R-406	38.08N, 128.01E	656	2,000 × 45 Asphalt	19	
R-218 Ha Jun Ni	37.53N, 126.58E	361	1,700 × 70 Asphalt	20	
R-314 Shin San Ri	38.08N, 127.44E	600	1,900 × 80 Earth	20	
R-219 Bong Am Ri	37.54N, 127.01E	295	1,400 × 60 Asphalt	21	
R-313 Ip Yong Ni Won Tong	38.06N, 128.12E	672	1,656 × 98 Earth	22	
R-312 Hwach'on	38.07N, 127.41E	460	1,700 × 50 Asphalt	24	
R-404 Yang-gu	38.04N, 127.31E	855	1,900 × 50 Earth	25	
R-113 Susaek	38.05N, 127.59E	675	3,600 × 100 Asphalt	25	
	37.35N, 126.52E	64	3,900 × 60 Asphalt	26	Second asphalt runway, 2,460 × 56

Airfields—Republic of Korea

Designation alt. designation(s)	Location	Altitude (ft)	Runway dimensions, surface type (ft)	Approx distance to DMZ (km)	Comments
R-222	37.49N, 126.59E	295	3,500 × 60 Asphalt	27	
R-233 Unchon-ni	38.04N, 127.16E	340	2,300 × 80 Earth	27	
R-311	38.03N, 127.48E	590	1,410 × 42 Earth	27	
Kimpo Int'l K-14	37.33N, 126.47E	58	10,500 × 150 Asphalt	28	
R-224	37.56N, 127.11E	370	1,378 × 49 Earth	30	
Pup Yong	37.31N, 126.42E	62	Earth	30	
R-231 Ungam-ni	38.01N, 127.22E	425	2,400 × 60 Asphalt	34	
R-103	37.28N, 126.45E	92	1,640 × 99 Asphalt	36	
R-217 Chajang-ni	37.51N, 127.11E	328	3,600 × 80 Asphalt	38	
R-307	37.55N, 127.45E	270	2,000 × 50 Asphalt	42	
R-407 Sokcho	38.08N, 128.36E	92	4,757 × 85 Asphalt	42	
R-420 Hyun Ni	37.57N, 128.19E	900	2,700 × 80 Asphalt	45	

R-203	37.38N, 127.09E	80	1,800 × 70 Earth	46	
A-306 Chunch'on K-47	37.52N, 127.43E	245	4,000 × 80 Asphalt	49	
R-213	37.48N, 127.21E	420	2,200 × 100 Asphalt	50	
R-304	37.50N, 127.31E	210	1,800 × 80 Asphalt	53	
Seoul AB K-16	37.27N, 128.07E	92	9,000 × 150 Concrete	55	Second concrete runway, 8,000 × 150. Highway strip.
Suwon R-419	37.18N, 127.06E 37.42N, 127.54E	330 450	2,500 × 150 Earth	66 68	
Suwon AB K-13	37.14N, 127.00E	86	9,000 × 150 Asphalt	68	2nd concrete runway, 9,000 × 150. 5th Air Force base.
R-501 Yong In	37.17N, 127.13E	243	2,001 × 75 Asphalt	75	Second concrete runway, 675 × 75.
Osan AB K-55	37.05N, 127.02E	38	9,000 × 150 Concrete	84	5th Air Force base.
R-417	37.39N, 128.34E	1,722	1,400 × 80 Earth	85	
R-301	37.30N, 127.38E	230	1,600 × 100 Earth	90	
Kangnung K-18	37.45N, 128.57E	35	9,000 × 150 Concrete	92	
A-511 Camp Humphreys K-6	36.57N, 127.02E	47	6,200 × 150 Asphalt	98	Also known as Desiderio AAB.
Hoengsong	37.26N, 127.09E	328	8,130 × 120	98	

Airfields—Republic of Korea

Designation alt. designation(s)	Location	Altitude (ft)	Runway dimensions, surface type (ft)	Approx distance to DMZ (km)	Comments
K-46			Asphalt		
R-400 Wonju	37.20N, 127.58E	455	2,100 × 70 Asphalt	109	
P'yongt'aek Sokcho	36.54N, 127.11E	374	Asphalt	109	Highway strip.
R-418	37.20N, 128.23E	520	1,100 × 80 Earth	112	
P'yongch'ang					
R-530	36.45N, 126.20E	40	1,200 × 70 Earth	116	
Taegu AB Donch'on K-2	35.53N, 128.40E	116	9,039 × 150 Concrete	116	5th Air Force base.
R-605 Chech'on	37.10N, 128.13E	953	3,600 × 80 Asphalt	129	
R-526	36.35N, 126.40E	197	1,600 × 80 Earth	132	
Hongsong Up					
Ch'ongju AB Ky AB K-59	36.42N, 127.30E	191	9,000 × 150 Concrete	141	
R-604	37.03N, 127.56E	295	1,700 × 90 Earth	142	
R-505 Choch'iwon	36.34N, 127.17E	82	3,100 × 100 Asphalt	147	
R-532	36.32N, 127.17E	100	1,550 × 65 Asphalt	149	
R-506	36.36N, 127.30E	140	1,500 × 90 Earth	150	
R-525	36.18N, 126.31E	60	1,300 × 50	158	

R-525	36.18N, 126.31E	60	1,300 × 50	158
R-612	37.10N, 129.20E	33	Earth 1,200 × 60	168
Taejon K-5	36.20N, 127.23E	206	Earth 3,400 × 110	172
R-603	36.50N, 128.36E	492	Asphalt 1,295 × 80	173
Yongju	36.50N, 128.35E	510	Earth	173
Sawon	36.16N, 127.07E	37	Asphalt	173
Chukpyon	37.04N, 129.25E	165		180
R-601	36.38N, 128.10E	360	2,000 × 100	185
Munhyung			Earth	
Susan-ni (SW)	36.58N, 129.23E	8	Earth	188
R-500	36.06N, 127.06E	66	2,200 × 70	189
Nonsan			Asphalt	
Yech'on AB	36.37N, 128.21E	354	9,000 × 150	198
K-58			Concrete	
R-522	36.10N, 127.50E	546	1,200 × 50	200
Yongdong			Earth	
R-613	36.43N, 129.07E	1,000	Earth	202
Jhunu	35.52N, 127.07E	96	4,920 × 100	214
R-703			Asphalt	
Kunsan AB	35.54N, 126.37E	29	9,000 × 150	217
K-8			Concrete	
R-602	36.33N, 128.45E	312	1,350 × 50	224
			Earth	
R-611	36.25N, 129.22E	80	Earth	238

2nd concrete runway,
8,053 × 75, 5th AF
base.

Airfields—Republic of Korea

Designation alt. designation(s)	Location	Altitude (ft)	Runway dimensions, surface type (ft)	Approx distance to DMZ (km)	Comments
Chongup	35.37N, 126.53E	65		239	Highway strip.
Kunch'on	36.10N, 128.14E	300		246	Highway strip.
R-808	35.58N, 128.58E	246	2,500 × 60 Gravel	269	
R-707	35.31N, 127.44E	500	1,300 × 60 Earth	270	
Hamyang					
R-701	35.24N, 127.21E	276	4,600 × 120 Earth	271	
R-710	35.20N, 127.01E	132	1,200 × 50 Earth	275	
Tamyang					
R-712	35.16N, 126.31E		Earth	277	
P'ohang	35.59N, 129.25E	70	7,000 × 150 Concrete	284	
R-815					
K-3					
R-806	35.51N, 129.13E	86	2,100 × 100 Gravel	291	
Kyongju					
Kwang-ju	35.07N, 126.48E	42	9,300 × 150 Concrete	294	5th Air Force base.
K-57					
R-706	35.05N, 127.08E	460	1,300 × 60 Earth	300	
Naegi-ri	35.02N, 126.48E	42		303	Highway strip.
Onyang	35.32N, 129.07E	328		322	Highway strip.
R-721	34.58N, 127.29E	16	1,300 × 70 Earth	323	

Ulsan	35.35N, 129.21E	30	4,950 × 100 Asphalt	323
Mokp'o Yong	34.45N, 126.23E	10	3,806 × 100 Asphalt	333
R-803	35.15N, 128.52E	158	1,500 × 50 Asphalt	346
R-802 Changwon	35.14N, 128.37E	66	3,280 × 80 Earth	353
Busan Pusan K-9	35.10N, 129.07E	6	6,600 × 150 Asphalt	361
Kimhae Int'l Pusan West K-1	35.10N, 128.56E	13	9,000 × 150 Concrete	362
Sach'on AB R-814 K-4	35.05N, 128.05E	25	9,000 × 150 Concrete	363
R-709	35.03N, 127.45E	45	1,900 × 60 Earth	365
R-813 Chinhae K-10	35.08N, 128.42E	8	3,550 × 75 Asphalt	368
Yeosu	34.50N, 127.37E	68	3,937 × 98 Asphalt	385
Cheju Int'l K-40	33.30N, 126.29E	126	9,800 × 150 Asphalt	473
				2nd asphalt runway, 6,600 × 150; on Jeju-Do.

Sources: DMA, DOD Flight Information Publication (Enroute); Supplement Pacific, Australasia and Antarctica, 6 June 1985 & 18 December 1986. DMA, Maps: ONC G-10 (1:1,000,000), Edition 10; TPC G-10C (1:500,000), Edition 3 and TPC G-10B (1:500,000), Edition 4.

Airfields—Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Designation	Location	Altitude (ft)	Approx runway length (ft)	Approx distance to DMZ (km)	Comments
Ayang-ni	38.15N, 125.59E	299	5,600	53	Highway strip; possibly 6,000ft long.
Changjin-up	40.21N, 127.17E	3,550	9,500	221	Possibly a highway strip.
Changyon	38.14N, 125.09E	20	7,000	105	Highway strip; possibly 6,000ft long.
Ch'o Do	38.33N, 124.50E	49	3,200	146	Located on Ch'o Do.
Ch'ongjin	41.47N, 129.45E	32	4,200	472	
Haeju	38.00N, 125.47E	49	7,800	43	
Hoemun-ni	41.26N, 129.39E	35	8,600	431	
Hoeyang (Southeast)	38.39N, 127.35E	1,394	3,500	37	
Hwangju	38.08N, 125.47E	10	8,800	100	
Hwangsuwon-ni	40.41N, 128.09E	4,000	9,500	231	
Hyesan	41.22N, 128.13E	3,274	5,100	307	
Hyon-ni	38.37N, 127.28E	1,880	10,400	32	
Ich'on	38.39N, 126.38E	292	3,600	30	
Ich'on (Northeast)	38.40N, 126.55E	479	3,600	44	Runway length possibly 3,800ft.
Ihyon-ni	38.08N, 125.51E	381	3,400	48	Also known as Haeju (Northeast); possibly 3,200ft long.
Irhyang Dong	41.15N, 129.24E	300	4,300	310	
Kaech'on	39.45N, 125.53E	115	8,800	197	Also known as Saamcham.
Kangda-ri	39.06N, 127.24E	125	6,600	86	Highway strip. Also known as Wonsan South.
Kangdong	39.09N, 126.02E	79	4,100	296	
Kilchu	40.55N, 129.18E	250	6,600	267	Highway strip.
Kojo	38.50N, 127.52E	180	6,400	47	Highway strip.
Koksan	38.41N, 126.36E	745	7,200	62	
Koksan (South)	38.44N, 126.38E	719	7,200	62	
Kungang	38.38N, 127.59E	1,394	3,500	43	Highway strip.

Kuso	41.57N, 128.51E	3,200	5,200	471	
Kuam-ni	38.52N, 127.30E	180	4,100	46	
Kwail	38.25N, 125.01E	36	9,600	126	Also known as P'ungch'on
Kwaksan-ni	39.44N, 125.19E	200	3,300	233	Also known as Yongsang-ni.
Kyongsong (Southeast)	41.33N, 129.38E	40		445	
Maengsan	39.39N, 126.40E	1,670	9,500	155	
Nuch'on-ni	38.15N, 126.08E	164		48	Highway strip.
Nuch'on-ni	38.14N, 126.05E	62	7,400	44	Highway strip.
Okpyong-ni	39.16N, 127.19E	30	6,800	105	Second runway 8,800ft long.
Onch'on-up	38.54N, 125.14E	39	8,800	148	
Ongjin	37.56N, 125.25E	52	6,700	70	
P'yongyang East	39.01N, 125.50E	30		138	Also known as Mirim. Airborne training facility.
Panghyon	39.55N, 125.13E	230	9,600	245	Second runway 6,400ft long. Also known as Namsi
Panghyon (South)	39.53N, 125.08E	400	7,500	250	Highway strip. Also known as Namsi (South).
Pukchang	39.30N, 125.58E	135	8,800	165	Second runway 7,200ft long.
Pyong-ni	39.20N, 125.54E	194	9,600	155	Highway strip;
Pyong-ni (West)	39.26N, 125.49E	240	6,500	169	Highway strip. Not usable.
Pyongsul-ri	38.43N, 126.44E	643	3,000	57	
Saamcham (Southwest)	39.44N, 125.51E	59	5,200	192	Highway strip.
Sangwon	38.51N, 126.04E	98	8,600	106	Highway strip.
Sangwon-ni	40.07N, 125.52E	322	7,000	226	Highway strip.
Sinhung	40.10N, 127.35E	801	7,500	188	Highway strip.
Sinmusong	41.55N, 128.25E	4,400	12,800	464	
Sohung	38.21N, 126.14E	459		61	Also known as Sinmak (South).
Sonch'on (Southwest)	39.45N, 124.49E	16		256	
Sondok	39.44N, 127.29E	26	8,800	147	Also known as Sondong-ni.
Sunan	39.11N, 125.40E	151	1,200	158	

Airfields—Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Designation	Location	Altitude (ft)	Approx runway length (ft)	Approx distance to DMZ (km)	Comments
Sunan-up (North)	39.15N, 125.41E	89	7,200	107	Highway strip.
Suchon	39.25N, 125.53E	105	9,600	162	Two additional runways, each 4,800ft long.
T'aebukpo-ri	38.20N, 126.53E	250	7,200	17	Not usable.
T'aech'on	39.54N, 125.29E	79	6,400	227	Airborne training facility.
T'aech'on (Northwest)	39.59N, 125.22E	400		240	Not usable.
T'aet'an	38.08N, 125.15E	112	9,600	91	
Tanch'on (South)	40.24N, 128.53E	30	6,600	204	Highway strip.
Toha-ri (North)	38.42N, 126.17E	502		82	
Toksan	40.00N, 127.37E	115	9,500	166	Second runway 7,000ft long. Also known as Hamhung.
Uiju	30.40N, 127.35E	30	8,600	305	
Unch'on-up	38.33N, 125.20E	463		112	
Wongyo-ri	38.36N, 126.32E	587	6,800	59	Highway strip. Also known as Koksan (South).
Wonsan	39.10N, 127.29E	10	8,000	93	Second runway 7,200ft long.
Yonghung	39.32N, 127.17E	210	6,700	134	Highway strip.

Sources: DMA, Maps: ONC G-10 (1:1,000,000), Edition 10; and TPC G-10B (1:500,000), Edition 4.

Offensive operations

Due to the importance of the KPA's eight airborne light infantry brigades as a major part of the strategic reserve forces, their vital rear area security task and the KPAF's limited lift capabilities, it is doubtful that the equivalent of more than one or two airborne light infantry brigades would be employed for offensive operations during the initial stages of a renewed conflict. The remaining airborne light infantry brigades may be employed when sufficient reserves become available to assume the rear area security mission (after approximately 60 days) and if the KPAF can maintain its airlift capabilities. The primary missions for the one or two airborne light infantry brigades employed during the initial phases of a new conflict would include:

- Operational and tactical/special operations against all ROKAF/USAF airfields, strategic C³I centres, missile and radar sites.
- Support of strategic and operational-level amphibious landings.
- Combined operations with other SPF units.
- Tactical raids and ambushes against reinforcements, mobilising reserves and reserve mobilisation and storage facilities.
- Deception operations throughout the ROK.

The KPAF possesses the airborne lift capability to conduct one strategic-level airborne landing. However, such an operation would probably exhaust the resources of the KPAF and would be extremely costly because of probable ROKAF/USAF air superiority. An operation at this level would be expected to alter the course of the war and almost assuredly be conducted in combination with a strategic amphibious landing or major ground forces attack.

An assault on a major ROKAF/USAF airbase would be conducted by a reinforced battalion-sized unit. The conduct of the attack would include:

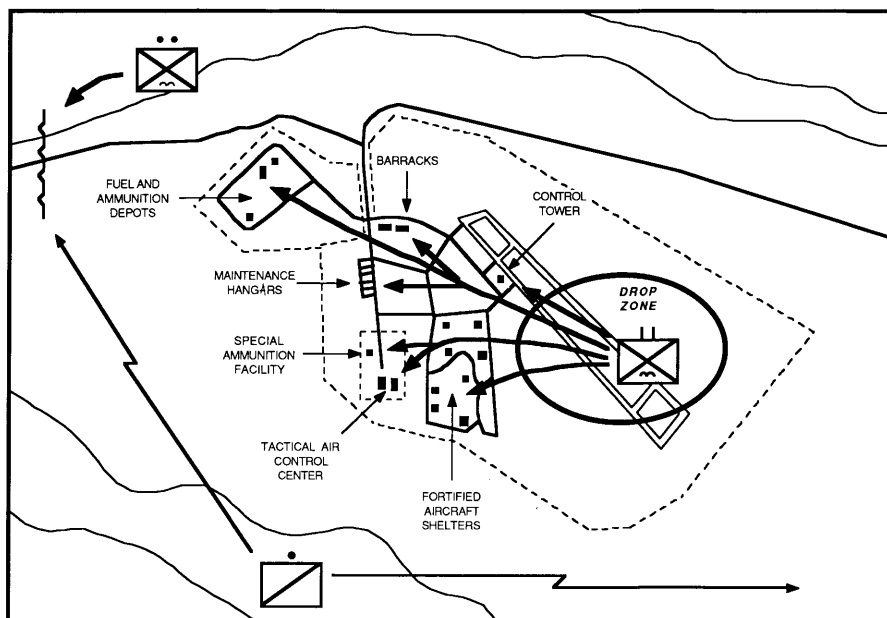
- Pre-mission training on mock-ups of the airbase and reconnaissance by KWP Liaison Department agents and reconnaissance brigade personnel.
- Prior to the attack small airborne light infantry and reconnaissance teams would be inserted into the area (possibly by MD 500D/E helicopters) to identify all major avenues of approach to the airfield. Just prior to the attack these units would establish blocking positions along all these routes and cut all known communications links.
- At dusk the airborne light infantry battalion would arrive in An-2's and parachute directly into the airbase. The initial wave may be accompanied by small numbers of MD 500D/E helicopters painted in ROK markings. These would neutralise the control tower and airfield defences.
- As the airborne personnel jump, those units outside the airbase would attack its perimeter defences.
- As the parachutists land they form up into headquarters, communications and security sub-teams and a number of general and special assault teams. The general assault teams would each be assigned a specific target within the airbase. Priority targets include aircraft, pilots, control tower, hangars, communications facilities and ammunition/fuel storage areas. The special assault teams will be tasked with seizing any nuclear or chemical munitions stored on the base and the capture of classified documents and senior officers.
- Additional airborne light infantry troops or even regular ground force units

would either be air-dropped or air-landed by An-2 Colt and An-24 Coke transports, as conditions permit.

- The final stage would either be exfiltration or the establishment of defensive positions to await the arrival of regular ground forces. If the unit is to hold the airbase, crew-served heavy weapons (ZPU-2/4, ZU-23, 120mm mortars, 76.2/85mm guns, etc.) would be dropped or air-landed. However, it should be noted that if the objective is important enough, these units may be expected to fight to the death with no relief or retreat expected or intended.

Other major targets for airborne light infantry units will include the ROKAF/USAF tactical air control centre at Osan air base and auxilliary tactical air control centre at Taegu airbase, the P'ohang-Uijongbu "army petroleum distribution" pipeline and its pumping stations (a major supply conduit of POL for ROK/US units), the Pusan—Uijongbu fibre-optics communication system and rail, power and communication networks.¹⁷ The attack against the latter two systems would in all probability be a combined operation with light infantry units being responsible for its northern terminus at Uijongbu, reconnaissance and airborne light infantry units for the stations throughout the interior and reconnaissance and amphibious light infantry units being responsible for the terminals in the ports of P'ohang and Pusan. During a prolonged war, airborne light infantry units would be employed primarily to conduct unconventional warfare (especially guerrilla warfare) and special operations throughout the ROK against strategic targets.

KPA airbase assault tactics.





The US merchant ship Cape Decto docks at P'ohang harbour, ROK, to deliver equipment for use in Exercise Team Spirit 86. (US Department of Defence/SSgt Peter Bradshaw Jr)

Defensive operations

The ability of the airborne light infantry brigades to conduct effective defensive operations while deployed within the ROK/US strategic rear is severely limited by the absence of heavy weapons and their dependence on extra-ordinary means of logistic support. This is especially true when defending against

an armoured or combined-arms attack. If forced into an untenable defensive situation, airborne light infantry brigades are likely to either attempt exfiltration to form small guerrilla units or to fight to the death.

During defensive operations within the DPRK the airborne light infantry brigades would participate in the defence of airfields and installations of strategic importance. Additionally, they are tasked with both general rear area security, including counter-airborne and counter-guerrilla operations, and instructing regular army and paramilitary reserve units in such operations. If the need arises the airborne light infantry brigades may also be employed as standard light infantry units.

Notes

1 The airborne light infantry brigades are also known as "airborne assault" or "airborne infiltration" brigades.

2 Manabu, p. 64.

3 "Military Assistance Reappraisal: FY1967-71", pp. IV-17 & 18 and Annex 12 pp. 4-7.

4 "North Korean Unconventional Warfare Capability", p. 8.

5 The battalion organisation may include a mortar battery.

6 "North Korean Air Assault Forces", p. vi.

7 For a discussion of PRC's XV Airborne Corps operations during the "Wuhan Incident" see: Jencks, Harlan W. *From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Army, 1945-1981*, Westview Press, 1982, pp. 95-99.

8 There is great uncertainty about the number of aircraft operated by the KPAF. The figures here should be taken as no more than representative. Aviation Advisory Service, *International Air Force and Military Aircraft Directory*, Aviation Advisory Service Ltd, 1987, pp. 181-82; and Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance: 1987-88*, Jane's Publishing Company Ltd, 1987. The former source also includes: 50 Mi-24 Hind, 5 Mi-14PL Haze and 50 additional Mi-8/17 Hip helicopters.

9 The KPAF acquired 87 Hughes helicopters: 20 Model 500Ds, 66 Model 500Es and one Model 300C. The designation of these aircraft has now changed. In January 1984 Hughes Helicopters Inc became a subsidiary of the McDonnell Corporation and in August 1985 changed its name to McDonnell Douglas Helicopter Company. The models in the 500 series are now designated MD 500D & E. However, production of the Model 300C was taken over by the Schweizer Aircraft Corporation in June 1984 and the helicopter was designated the Schweizer (Hughes) Model 300C.

10 Defence Intelligence Agency. "North Korea: Threat Presented by An-2 Colt", DIAIAPPR, 12 June 1980, p. 1; and "North Korean Military Threat Assessed", *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, 7 February 1983, p. 42.

11 "North Korean Military Threat Assessed", p. 42.

12 Meyer, Deborah G. "Does the US Need to Modernize its Army in the Pacific", *Armed Forces Journal International*, May 1985, p. 104.

13 For an interesting discussion of the UNC difficulties in countering KPAF nuisance raids during the Fatherland Liberation War see: O'Conner, Mike. "Coping with Charlie", *Journal of the American Aviation Historical Society*, Spring 1985, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 2-11; "Enemy Light Plane Raids in Korea", *ONI Review*, August 1953, Vol. 8, No. 8, pp. 378-379; and "Korea (North Korea): Notes from a North Korean Defector", *ONI Review*, November 1955, Vol. 10, No. 11, p. 606.

14 "North Korea Imports Gliders from USSR for Military Use", *North Korea News*, September 1986, No. 340, p. 2.

15 "North Korean People's Army Operations", p. 17-6.

16 *Ibid*, p. 17-7.

17 The Osan facility "... serves the same function for South Korea as the North American Aerospace Defense Command complex, in Cheyenne Mountain, Colo., does for the US and Colorado.". "Command, control capability upgraded", *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, 7 February 1983, p. 71.

Chapter Nine

Reconnaissance brigades¹

“In wartime, we expect some of these troops will be inserted behind the main battle area to disrupt defensive efforts as well as to attack selected tactical targets. In peacetime, they are probably being used for infiltration and intelligence gathering missions” — DIA²

General

Today's reconnaissance brigades are distant cousins to the reconnaissance units of the Fatherland Liberation War. During the years immediately following the Armistice Agreement the KPA underwent a major reorganisation to consolidate its forces and enhance their combat capabilities. This reorganisation saw a number of miscellaneous reconnaissance and intelligence units being disbanded and then reconstituted as “sniper” units. The mission of these new “sniper” units was more than the collection of military intelligence, it extended into the area of special operations as is indicated by the honorific “sniper” title given to them. These “sniper” units remained active until the early 1960s.

Following the failure to exploit ROK vulnerabilities during the 1960 student uprisings, the intelligence agencies underwent a reorganisation. Partly as a result of this and partly as a by-product of the general reorganisation within the KPA, a majority of the miscellaneous intelligence and unconventional warfare units were disbanded and two new types of unit were raised: the “foot reconnaissance brigade” and the “light infantry regiment”. The foot reconnaissance brigades were apparently formed around a cadre of former Branch Unit, guerrilla and “sniper” personnel. These new units, which totalled approximately 3,000 men, were subordinated to the Reconnaissance Bureau's three regional headquarters—Foot Reconnaissance Centres. The number of reconnaissance brigades gradually increased during the 1960s and in a few short years these units provided the cadre around which the KPA's airborne light infantry units were formed. Later, in March of 1967, a new specialised unconventional warfare formation—the 124th Army Unit—was formed. Personnel for this new unit were hand picked from both the foot reconnaissance brigades and light infantry regiments.

During 1969 the 124th Army Unit was disbanded and in its place VIII Special Purpose Corps was formed. This new unit was built around a cadre drawn from the 124th Army Unit and augmented by elements from the 283rd Army Unit and an unidentified light infantry brigade. The establishment of VIII Special Purpose Corps resulted in the Reconnaissance Bureau's Foot Reconnaissance

sance Centres being disbanded and their personnel being transferred to VIII Special Purpose Corps or the reconnaissance brigades. Four of the reconnaissance brigades were reorganised and subordinated to VIII Special Purpose Corps while the remaining reconnaissance units were deactivated to act as a cadre or “fillers” for new special purpose units. Since this time, these four reconnaissance brigades have continued to develop into highly specialised units whose skills extend beyond routine reconnaissance to the area of special operations. In fact, they have evolved into the elite of the SPF with specialised skills, equipment and elite capabilities that are comparable to present day US Special Forces and Soviet *Vysotniki* and GRU Troops.

Missions

The reconnaissance brigades are tasked with a wide variety of strategic/theatre/global-level reconnaissance and special operations missions. These operations may be conducted during peace and war. Objectives include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Provision of timely and accurate intelligence to the General Staff Department and corps commanders.
- The seizure or destruction of strategic/theatre and global C³I, missile, radar and NBC warfare installations.
- The assassination or abduction of ROK political leaders and senior ROK/US military commanders.
- Special operations, including “direct action” and diversionary operations.
- The establishment of military and political intelligence networks within the ROK and fostering the growth of guerrilla forces.



Pan Am Boeing 747 takes on military equipment at Osan Air Base, ROK, during Exercise Team Spirit 86. Fields like Osan are high on the reconnaissance brigades' target list. (US Department of Defence/T'Sgt Lee Schading)

- Assisting other SPF units with the interdiction, seizure or control of strategic targets (airfields, POL facilities, lines of communication, etc.).
- Assisting other SPF units with the seizure of critically important topographic and tactical features (mountain passes, tunnels, bridges, etc.) and civilian facilities (railways, highways, power plants, etc.).
- Extra-peninsula special operations.
- Provision of military training to foreign governments, revolutionary organisations and terrorist groups.
- Foreign internal security and defence operations.

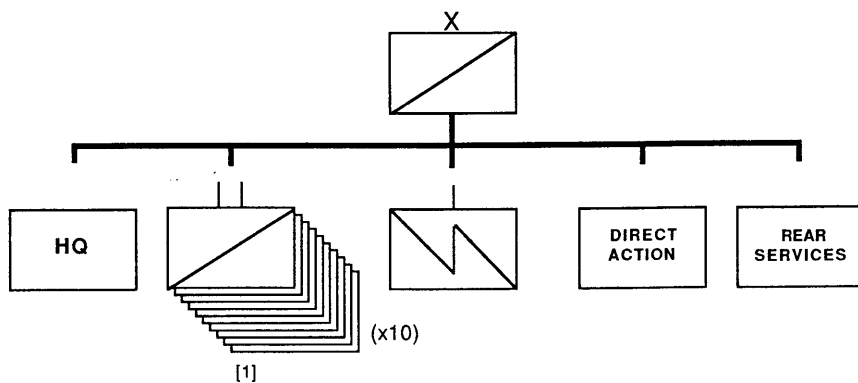
Command and control

The chain of command for the reconnaissance brigades extends from the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces, through the General Staff Department's Reconnaissance Bureau and VIII Special Purpose Corps to the individual reconnaissance brigades. During peacetime those reconnaissance brigades located within the "forward" corps areas are believed to be subordinate to, and under the operational control of, the reconnaissance section (G-2) of the respective corps headquarters. During wartime, control of these units reverts to VIII Special Purpose Corps. Due to the sensitive nature of reconnaissance brigade operations, there exists an intimate relationship between these units and the KWP Liaison Department, General Staff Department's Reconnaissance Bureau, General Political Bureau and the Political Security Department.

Organisation and equipment

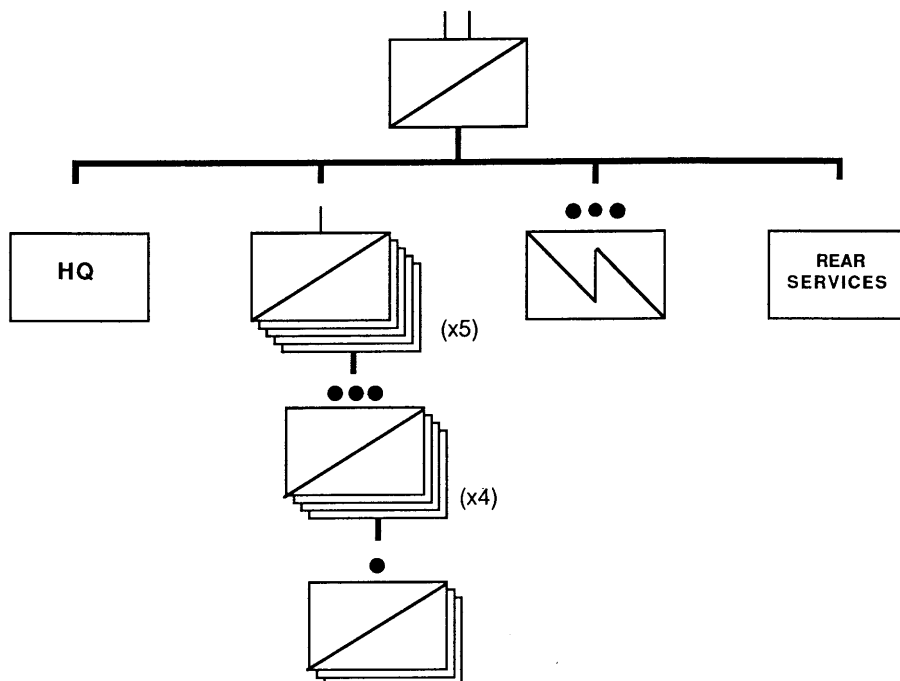
The KPA's four reconnaissance brigades have a total personnel strength of approximately 16,800. These brigades are presently deployed with I Corps (forward)—one; II Corps (forward)—one; IV Corps—one and V Corps (forward)—one. Each reconnaissance brigade has a personnel strength of approximately 4,200 and is organised into a headquarters element, a rear services element, a signals company and 10 reconnaissance battalions. Each battalion has a personnel strength of approximately 400 and is organised into a headquarters element, a rear services element, a signals platoon and five companies of four platoons each. Each platoon has three squads. A squad is commanded by an officer and includes a second-in-command and communications, demolition, reconnaissance and mission specialists. Unlike other SPF brigades where the battalion is the basic unit for combat operations, the reconnaissance team/squad is the basic operational unit within the reconnaissance brigade. Each reconnaissance brigade is theoretically capable of deploying approximately 400 10-man reconnaissance teams/squads.

It is believed that specific elements of each brigade are specially trained and organised for "direct action" (company?) and diversionary (battalion?) operations. "Direct action" operations are primarily concerned with the assassination or abduction of enemy personnel and occur both during peace and wartime. Such operations are almost always conducted with support from agents of the KWP Liaison Department or the Political Security Department. Diversionary operations seek to seize strategic objectives before they can be destroyed, to destroy strategic objectives that cannot be destroyed by conven-



1. At least one battalion is believed to be organized to conduct diversionary operations.

Reconnaissance brigade.



Reconnaissance battalion.

tional means and to create confusion and panic in the rear areas. These operations are carried out with reconnaissance brigade personnel disguised partially or completely in ROKA uniforms or civilian clothing. Diversionary units are trained in the use of, and are supplied with, ROK/US uniforms and equipment. This equipment is believed to include M16 assault rifles, M60 light machine-guns and a small numbers of M113 APCs painted as ROKA vehicles. Although not equipped with M48 tanks, elements of the diversionary troops are believed to be qualified in their operation. To further support "direct action" and diversionary operations, an unknown number of female personnel may be either organic to each reconnaissance brigade or attached from the KWP Liaison Department or the Political Security Department. Small numbers of personnel in each brigade are believed to be qualified in HALO, HAHO and combat-swimmer operations.

The weapons and equipment likely to be found within the reconnaissance brigades are the same as those for the standard light infantry brigade, although it would be unusual for any weapons heavier than the 60mm mortar to be carried, and communications equipment will be more sophisticated (e.g. long-range burst-transmission radios). All reconnaissance personnel will make use of ROKA uniforms, civilian clothing, civilian transport and other captured equipment.

Operations within the Korean Peninsula

During operations within the Korean Peninsula the reconnaissance brigades are responsible for intelligence gathering for both the General Staff Department and corps commanders, supporting other SPF operations and conducting special operations.

Reconnaissance teams/squads of 5-10 members conduct independent long-range patrols in much the same manner as current US Long-Range Surveillance Units.³ These teams are normally inserted with the assistance of either the KPN or KPAF. Apart from traditional reconnaissance duties these reconnaissance teams provide support for other SPF operations by conducting pre-mission reconnaissance, raids, ambushes, etc.

Special operations primarily consist of "direct action" and diversionary operations. "Direct action" teams may attempt to "decapitate" the ROK political and the ROK/US military command and control systems by the assassination or abduction of senior leaders. Whereas diversionary troops, posing as ROKA troops, would conduct a variety of operations to assist other SPF operations and to spread confusion and fear throughout the rear areas. Such diversionary operations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Posing as military police and directing traffic along the wrong roads and into waiting ambushes.
- Posing as reinforcements, these troops would spearhead special operations against airfields, strategic/theatre C³I and NBC warfare assets (special attention would be paid to tactical air control centres at Osan and Taegu Airbases and the nuclear weapons stored at Kunsan Airbase).⁴
- Capture militarily strategic points such as bridges, tunnels, dams, hydro-electric plants, etc., before they can be destroyed by ROK/US forces.

Due to their unique skills and capabilities it is conceivable that elements of the reconnaissance brigades may also be employed in the strategic counter-



USAF C-130 Hercules transport aircraft taxi at P'ohang during Team Spirit 86. The reconnaissance brigades would seek to disrupt this type of reinforcement effort. (USAF/ MSgt Alex Taningco)

guerrilla role (i.e. the protection of strategically important facilities from ROK/US special operations).

Operations beyond the Korean Peninsula

Operations beyond the Korean Peninsula currently appear to be concerned with "direct action" and foreign military assistance. However, during wartime this will be expanded to include Special operations against US theatre/global facilities such as 5th Air Force airfields in Japan and on Okinawa, US bases at Subic Bay in the Philippines or Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

Direct action The two most widely known reconnaissance brigade operations conducted beyond the Korean Peninsula were both direct-action missions. These were the 9 October 1983 Rangoon assassination attempt on ROK President Chun Doo Hwan and the 1978 kidnapping of two ROK film personalities.

Sometime during August 1983 a small direct-action team was assembled to conduct the assassination of ROK President Chun Doo Hwan. The team consisted of three reconnaissance personnel: Major Zin Mo (commander), Captain Kim Chi-o (demolition specialist), and Captain Kang Min-chul (demolition specialist). Although details of their pre-mission training are incomplete, it is known that they received intensive training for their specific mission in the city of Kaesong (II "forward" Corps).⁵ Additionally, they could speak Chinese, Russian and English. After receiving a final mission briefing by their unit commander, at Kang Chang-su, the team boarded the freighter "Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho" (see amphibious light infantry brigades above) at the port of Ongjin on 9 September 1983.⁶

On 17 September the "Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho" entered Rangoon with a cargo of workers and equipment for an industrial plant being constructed with DPRK assistance. The ship unloaded its cargo on 21 September and was scheduled to leave when the captain requested permission to stay in port until 28 September to make repairs. Permission was granted and the ship was ordered to move 22km up-river to conduct its repairs. On 22 September the reconnaissance team left the ship dressed as crew members. Upon entering Rangoon the team

was met by a woman (possibly a KWP Liaison Department agent) who guided them to the home of a counsellor from the DPRK Embassy. Two days later, on 24 September, the team received final orders and explosives. The team remained at the counsellor's home until 6 October when they conducted a reconnaissance of the "Martyrs' Mausoleum". At 2000 hours the next day the team infiltrated the mausoleum and planted three explosive devices. Two days later, at 1025 hours on 9 October, the reconnaissance team detonated the explosives by remote control. Fortunately, the team had mistaken Ambassador Lee Kae-chul's motorcade for that of President Chun Doo Hwan. Following the explosions the team had planned to return to the counsellor's home. However, due to the presence of Burmese security personnel, the team split into two and headed for the Rangoon River where they were to be picked up by the "Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho" on 12 October. Meanwhile, the Burmese security authorities had initiated an extensive search operation to locate and capture the team. The next day, 10 October, Major Zin Mo was arrested after being spotted swimming across a small river. He lost one eye and an arm when he attempted to kill himself to avoid capture. Two days later, on 12 October, while waiting to rendezvous with the "Tong Gon Ae Guk Ho", Captains Kang Min-chul and Kim Chi-o were located along a river bank. In the subsequent chase and fire-fight Captain Kim Chi-o was killed and Captain Kang Min-chul was arrested after being wounded while attempting to kill himself to avoid capture.⁷

The 1978 kidnappings of the two ROK film personalities, Shin San Ok and his wife Choi Un Hui, were believed to have been conducted by reconnaissance personnel at the direct request of Kim Jong-Il (Kim Il-sung's son and heir apparent). The actual kidnapping operations themselves were not unusual yet they do present several interesting facets which seem to fit the developing pattern of reconnaissance operations. In both operations the kidnapping teams were small, consisting of three to five persons, at least one member or accomplice was a female, members wore civilian clothing and spoke at least Korean and Chinese (possibly Japanese as well) and both kidnappings consisted of an abduction in a foreign country and a subsequent transfer to a DPRK cargo ship for the voyage to the DPRK.⁸ Although it was actually carried out by personnel of the KWP-Liaison Department, the 29 November 1987 bombing of Korean Airlines (KAL) flight 858 from Abu Dhabi to Seoul also fits the developing pattern of KPA direct-action operations. It was carried out by a small team (at least two people), one of whom was a woman; both team members were in civilian clothing; both could speak Korean, Chinese and Japanese; and both attempted suicide when exposure and capture were imminent.⁹

Foreign military assistance¹⁰ DPRK foreign military assistance is influenced by the belief that "... the communist countries can obstruct belligerency of the 'imperialists' only when they can fan the revolutionary flame for anti-imperialistic and anti-American struggle of all the people of the world."¹¹

This belief is manifested through an extensive foreign military assistance policy. This policy includes the provision of military training to foreign governments, revolutionary organisations and terrorist groups, foreign internal security and defence operations and arms transfers. The majority of all DPRK military advisory teams throughout the world are believed to be reconnaissance personnel. Since the late 1960s, when KPA anti-ROK special operations peaked, the DPRK has been making extensive attempts to de-stabilise

pro-Western governments and support anti-imperialist governments and organisations.

The DPRK operates numerous guerrilla-warfare training facilities for communist revolutionaries and international terrorists, both within the DPRK and abroad. According to ROK intelligence sources there are reportedly 30 such facilities within the DPRK. The course of instruction at these facilities can last from three to 18 months and covers a broad range of subjects including urban or rural guerrilla warfare, counterinsurgency, internal security, VIP kidnap and assassination techniques, psychological warfare, etc. It is further estimated that since the late 1960s these training facilities alone have trained in excess of 5,000 foreign students. Graduates include members from the African National Congress, Angolan People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, Baader-Meinhof, Palestine Liberation Organisation, Mozambique Liberation Front, Red Brigades, Sandinista National Liberation Front, South West African People's Organisation and others.

Guerrilla-warfare training outside the DPRK is also extensive. ROK intelligence sources estimate that there are KPA military advisory missions operating in at least 34 countries in Central and South America, Asia and Africa. The size of these missions varies from a few dozen to over one hundred personnel. The subjects taught are just as diverse as are those taught within the DPRK but are specifically tailored to the local conditions. For example, the guerrilla-warfare instructors in South Yemen are members of a 140-man military advisory mission. Their course of instruction includes the use of explosives, bomb and boobytrap construction, clandestine organisation and communications, kidnap and assassination techniques, the use of small arms, document forgery, communications techniques and equipment repair, etc.

As well as guerrilla-warfare training these military advisory missions provide conventional training assistance and arms transfers with instructors ranging from experts in regular ground forces operations to armour and jet pilot instructors. Equipment transfers can include tanks and armoured personnel carriers; artillery (up to 130mm); jeep-mounted recoilless rifles; multiple rocket launchers; communications equipment; fast attack craft; small arms and ammunition and more.¹² In addition to their instruction responsibilities, these military advisory teams conduct a wide variety of missions including active combat and internal security operations, operation and maintenance of sophisticated military equipment and armed forces management.

An indication of the extent of the DPRK's involvement in the international arena is that almost 7,000 KPA personnel have been dispatched to 47 different countries and 62 nations have been identified with DPRK guerrilla-warfare training since 1968: 25 are located in Africa, 19 in the Western hemisphere, nine in Asia, seven in the Middle East and two in Europe.¹³ While conducting training abroad the KPA military advisory missions have worked closely with Soviet, Cuban, East German and PRC counterparts.

Notes

1 The reconnaissance brigades are still sometimes identified as "sniper" brigades.

2 As cited in "North Korea's Temptation", p. 4.

3 The US Army has recently reorganised its long-range ground reconnaissance assets into Long-Range Surveillance Units. There is now a long-range surveillance company at corps level and a long-range surveillance detachment at divisional level.

- 4 The following US nuclear weapons are reportedly stored at Kunsan Airbase: 60 air deliverable bombs, 40 8in and 30 155mm artillery projectiles and 21 ADMs (Atomic Demolition Munitions). Arkin, William M. and Fieldhouse, Richard W. *Nuclear Battlefields: Global Links in the Arms Race*, Ballinger Publishing Company, 1985, p. 231.
- 5 Since this team trained in the II Corps (forward) city of Kaesong, it is possible that it was part of the 62nd Reconnaissance Brigade's "direct action" unit. Sources indicate that the parent unit for the team had received the "red flag of three revolutions" award. "Details of Burma Bombing Revealed in Confession", p. 4.
- 6 Ibid.; and "Terrorists Enter Rangoon as 'Sailors' ", p. 1.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Gwertzman, Bernard. "Two Korean Film Figures Tell of Abduction to North". New York Times, 15 May 1986, pp. A1 & A20; and Sexton, William. "A Rare Peek at N. Korea's Rulers". Newsday, 27 May 1987, pp. 9 & 13.
- 9 Agency for National Security Planning (ROK). "Results of the Investigation into the Bombing of Korean Air Flight 858", 15 January 1988; "Suspects in Crash Take Suicide Pills". New York Times, 2 December 1987, pp. A1 & A14; Haberman, Clyde. "Seoul Suspects North in Jet Crash", New York Times, 3 December 1987, p. A5; "Seoul Seeks Suspect's Extradition". New York Times, 8 December 1987, p. A5; and "Suicide Victim in Jet Inquiry Termed North Korea Envoy", New York Times, 11 December 1987, p. A14.
- 10 Hahn, pp. 18-22; Insight. "The Selling of Terrorism: Profit from a Lucrative Export". 20 July 1987, pp. 30-31; Haberman, Clyde. "North Korea Reported to Step Up Arms Sales and Training Abroad", New York Times, 29 November 1987, pp. A1 & A9; and *Vantage Point*. "Pyongyang Attempting to Strengthen its Foothold in Third World", June 1987, Vol. X, No. 6, pp. 21-23.
- 11 As cited in "Dilemma for the Mavericks of P'yongyang", p. 18.
- 12 For example, DPRK aid to Nicaragua has included: 1980—20 military advisers; 1982—60 pieces of anti-tank artillery; 1983—two patrol boats and small quantities of anti-tank artillery and small arms; 1986—two patrol boats and 100,000 rounds of small arms ammunition. *Vantage Point*, "North Korea to increase Military Aid to Nicaragua", July 1987, Vol. X, No. 7, pp. 13 & 14.
- 13 "Dilemma for the Mavericks of P'yongyang", p. 18.

Chapter Ten

Combined-arms brigades¹

"Guderian would have loved these units" — ROKA officer

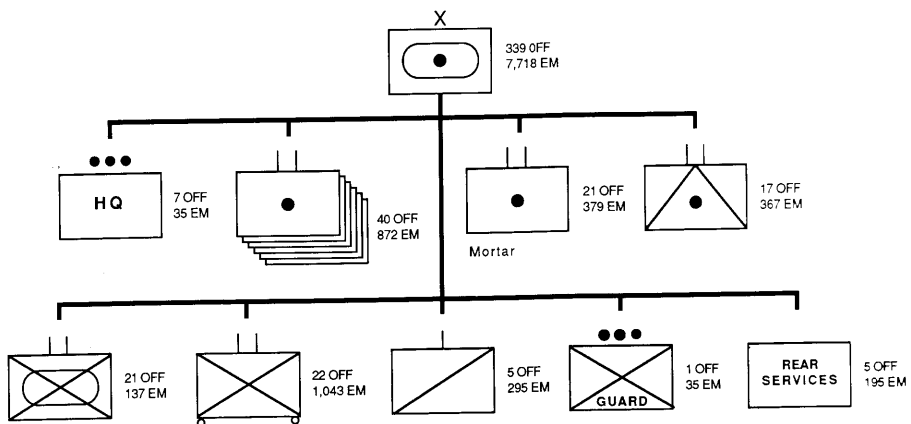
General

Until the early 1980s VIII Special Purpose Corps included approximately 17,000 troops organised into five combined-arms brigades. These combined-arms brigades are unique units having no direct counterpart in present Western, Soviet or even PRC armies. They are true combined-arms units which have the unusual dual mission of DMZ assault and coastal defence. Their development was initially in response to the need to protect the DPRK's long and vulnerable coastlines from UNC invasion. Later development was apparently influenced by the specific operational requirement of breaching the fortified demilitarised zone which separates the DPRK and the ROK. They are well organised, equipped and trained to accomplish their missions. Their characteristics of firepower, mobility, shock action and surprise put them among the KPA's principle instruments for influencing the initial stages of any new conflict.

History

At the time of the July 1953 Armistice Agreement which ended the overt hostilities of the Korean Fatherland Liberation War, the KPA order-of-battle contained seven GHQ-level infantry and mechanised artillery brigades (20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th and 26th).² These units were responsible for the defence of the DPRK's southwest and eastern coasts. Although designated as "brigades" these units actually represented a heterogeneous collection of infantry, artillery, mortar, tank, assault gun and support battalions grouped together under one headquarters and which varied greatly in manpower and equipment.

With the signing of the Armistice Agreement, the Ministry of National Defence (MND) embarked on an ambitious reconstruction programme to rebuild and re-equip the KPA. This programme concentrated primarily on the front-line units and only began to effect the GHQ-level brigades in late 1954. At that time they were apparently redesignated as infantry brigades and attempts were made to apply a standard T/O&E to the brigades' organic infantry battalions and, although they lacked sufficient weapons and service support elements, began the transformation into a regimental structure.



Mechanised artillery brigade, 1952.

Beginning in late 1955 as the Soviet Union provided additional training support and additional quantities of weapons and equipment, these brigades were assigned a new T/O&E consisting of three infantry regiments and four artillery/mortar battalions. The brigades' infantry regiments gradually began to develop an organisational structure similar to that of the regiments in an infantry division. The various artillery units were standardised on specific weapons and were usually organised into two artillery and two mortar battalions. These changes were by no means universally applied among the brigades. By January 1956 only the 20th, 21st, 22nd and 26th Brigades were organised on the new T/O&E, and even they displayed significant diversities of equipment and personnel strengths. The T/O&Es of the 23rd, 24th and 25th Brigades still represented an heterogeneous collection of battalions even though they were beginning to develop along standard battalion T/O&Es.

With the completion of the CVA phased withdrawal in October 1958, the MND apparently tasked the infantry brigades with the additional mission of deep area defence. More importantly, the withdrawal of the CVA apparently resulted in two brigades being reorganised as infantry divisions thus reducing the number of GHQ infantry brigades to five.

By the early 1960s a number of gradual but significant organisational changes were in progress. Most noticeable were;

- The establishment of a mortar regiment was accomplished by the addition of a third mortar battalion. Additionally, the mortar battalions were now equipped exclusively with the 120mm M-1943 mortar.
- The addition of a third artillery battalion equipped with the 76.2mm gun. The two original artillery battalions were also standardised on the 76.2mm gun although some brigades were organised with two 76.2mm gun and one 122mm howitzer battalions. These three artillery battalions were apparently not organised into a regimental structure.
- The establishment of an AAA company/battalion at brigade level. Although assessed in the early 1960s as having eighteen 37/57mm AA guns, it is more than likely that these units were equipped with dual purpose 12.7mm and 14.5mm machine guns. Some brigades contained only an AAMG company for a long time.

- The signals platoon/company was expanded to battalion size. Attempts were made to standardise on Soviet communications equipment (i.e. the R-100 series of field radios).
- Engineering elements were expanded to battalion size.
- A brigade-level reconnaissance element, normally assessed as a company, was established.
- A brigade-level chemical defence element was established. Although it is more probable that it was not until the early 1970s that these units were brought up to platoon size.

The net result of these changes was a brigade structure that was remarkably similar to that of the then standard KPA infantry division.

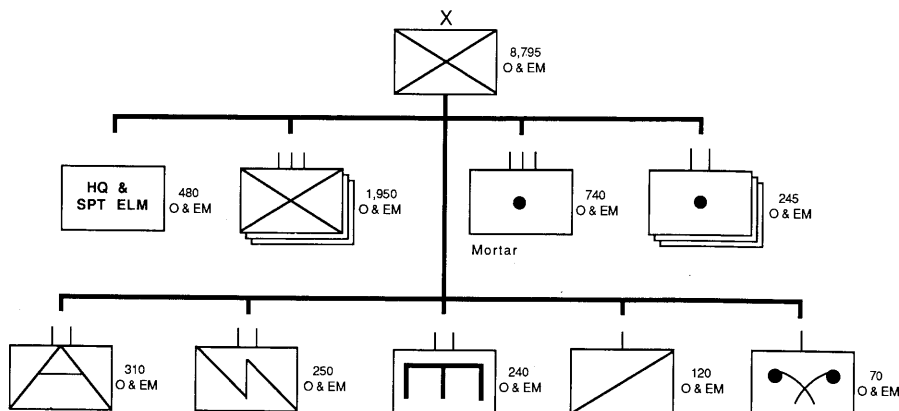
There is some evidence to indicate that while the standardisation of the GHQ infantry brigades continued through the mid-1960s there was also a reduction in the number of brigades with the 23rd Brigade either being redesignated as an infantry division or being disbanded with its personnel being used to establish an amphibious light infantry regiment and to reinforce the other GHQ infantry brigades. However, during the late 1960s and early 1970s either another unit was redesignated as a GHQ infantry brigade or a new unit was activated in its place. This brought the total back up to five. The reason for this change is unclear but it might be related to the increased DPRK concern over possible US retaliation for recent aggressive acts (like the 1968 capture of the USS *Pueblo*, the assassination attempt upon ROK President Park Chun Hee and the 1969 shooting down of a US Navy EC-121M).

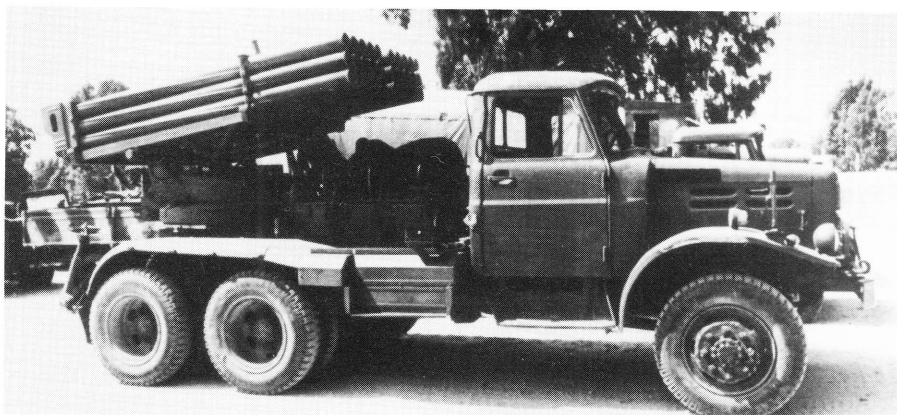
Dramatic changes took place within the KPA during the 1970s. These changes were the results of two major events which were themselves shaped by and effected by countless minor events.

The first event was the decision during 1969–70 to commence the mechanisation of the KPA. Key elements in the mechanisation were;

- The receipt of 1,000–1,200 Soviet T-54/55 and Chinese Type 59 medium tanks during 1971–76.
- The indigenous production of the Chinese Type 63 APC, the locally designed

Infantry brigade, early 1960s.





This North Korean-made BM-11 multiple rocket launcher was captured by the Israelis in the Lebanon in June 1982. (Israeli Defence Forces)

BM-11 MRL (derived from the Soviet BM-21), Sungri-58 and Sungri-61 trucks and a wide variety of other weapons and equipment.

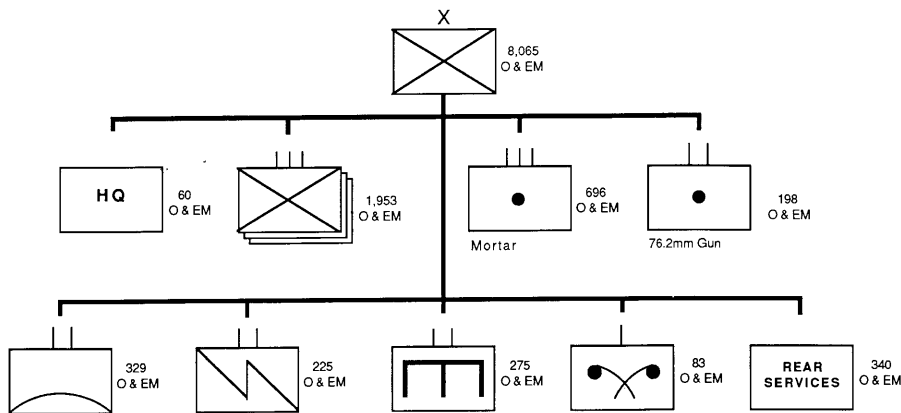
These changes allowed the KPA to standardise on the T-54/55 and Type 59 medium tanks which in turn released a number of T-34 tanks and SU-100 assault guns to form battalions within the rear area corps and GHQ infantry brigades.

The second event was the reorganisation and reduction of US forces in Korea during the early 1970s, including disbandment of the US 7th infantry Division in April 1971. In response to these events and the mechanisation of the KPA, the ROK committed itself to a major programme to enhance the fortifications of the DMZ. Upon evaluating these events, the KPA apparently concluded that the threat of a US amphibious landing was greatly reduced. This, coupled with the fact that the KPA now fielded a larger number of rear area divisions, several coastal defence artillery brigades and was nearing the deployment of the Soviet S-2 (SSC-2b Samlet) coastal defence missile, made possible a reassessment of the role of the GHQ infantry brigades.³ It was concluded that these brigades could now be tasked with the mission of DMZ assault/exploitation.

These events resulted in additional organisational changes to the GHQ infantry brigades. Most notable was the loss of two artillery battalions with the remaining 76.2mm artillery battalion being redesignated as an anti-tank battalion. The infantry regiments began to receive a larger number of trucks which enhanced their mobility. The brigade support units began to reach their authorised manpower and equipment levels. These changes resulted in an overall reduction in brigade personnel strength to approximately 700. These organisational changes and additional missions resulted in the US identifying these units as "shock brigades".

The continuing effects of the above events resulted in further organisational changes within the brigades by the late-1970s, including;

- The disbandment of two infantry regiments the third being reorganised into three infantry battalions. These "new" infantry battalions became fully truck-mobile. The disbanded infantry regiment personnel were apparently



Shock brigade, mid-1970s.

transferred either to the newly forming motorised infantry divisions or to GHQ-level armoured regiments (which were then redesignated as armoured brigades).

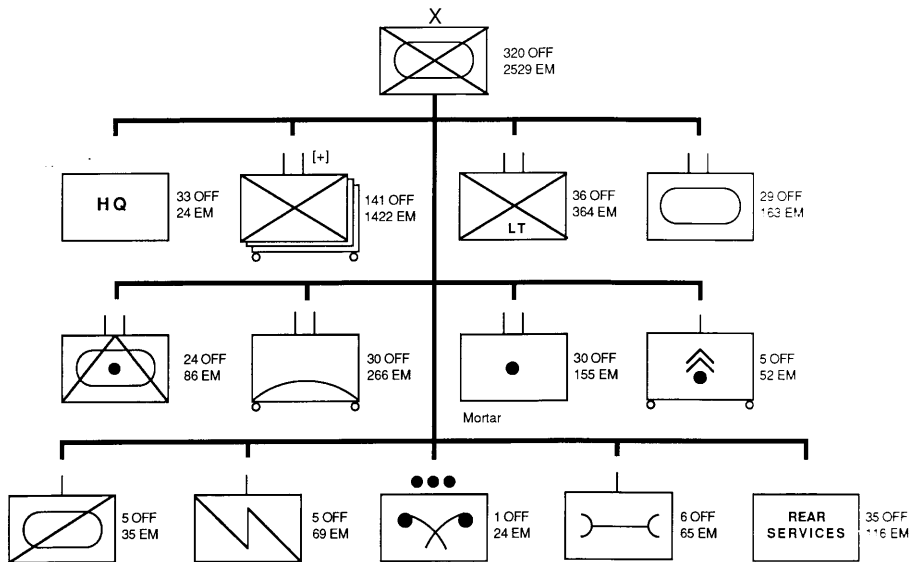
- The inclusion of a light infantry battalion at brigade level.
- The disbandment of the engineer battalion structure with an engineer company being integrated into each infantry battalion. These engineers were then trained as combat/assault engineers.
- The replacement of the 76.2mm anti-tank battalion by an SU-100 assault-gun battalion.
- The AAA battalion was either motorised or equipped with truck/APC-mounted AAA guns.
- The mortar regiment was relegated to a mortar battalion.
- Both a T-34 tank battalion and a 122mm MRL company were formed.

These changes caused the US to reclassify these brigades as combined-arms brigades during the early 1980s.

The most recent organisational changes are believed to have occurred during the early 1980s when the assault-gun battalion was replaced by two self-propelled artillery battalions and the tank battalion began re-equipping with T-54/55 and Type 59 medium tanks. The current organisation resembles that of a KPA motorised infantry division with the division's brigade/regiment-sized combat and battalion-sized support units being represented within the combined-arms brigades by corresponding battalion and company-sized units. The exceptions to this are the combined-arms brigade's self-propelled anti-aircraft battalion and its chemical defence platoon. With the addition of the two self-propelled artillery battalions the brigade now has the equivalent of a divisional-level artillery regiment.

Missions

The KPA's combined-arms brigades are tasked with two primary missions: providing the nucleus of the DMZ breach/exploitation forces during any renewed KPA offensive and coastal defence. The former mission involves the clearing of a path across the DMZ to allow second echelon units to pass. As



Shock brigade, early 1980s.

secondary missions, the combined-arms brigades are tasked with the reduction of major ROK/US defensive zones, lines or positions hindering the advance of regular ground forces units, and rear area defence.

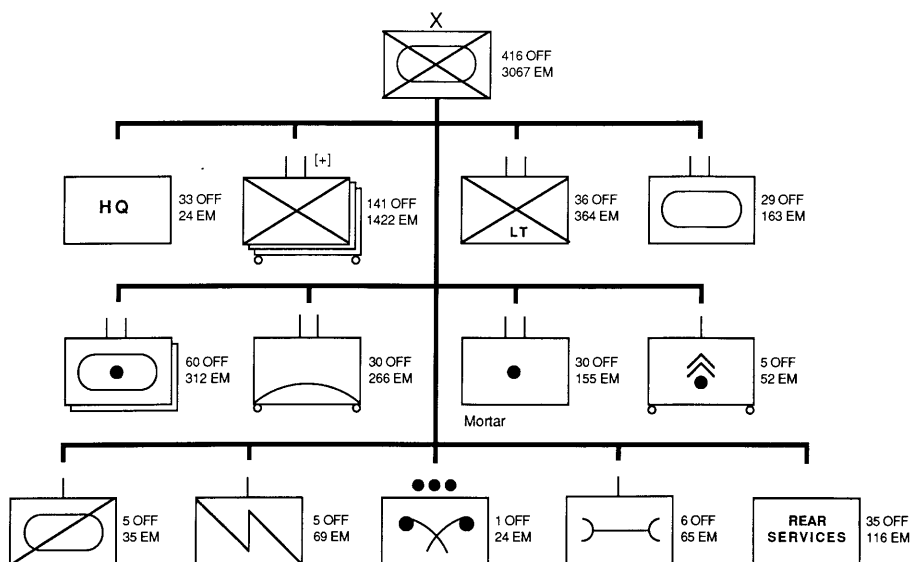
Command and control

The combined-arms brigades are independent units which are directly subordinate to the MPAF, through the General Staff Department. Additional administrative and technical support is provided by VIII Special Purpose Corps and the Artillery and Armour Command Headquarters. These brigades may be attached to an army group, corps or division in which case operational control is placed with the respective headquarters. The fact that a combined-arms brigade is located within an army group, corps or divisional area of responsibility is not necessarily an indication of administrative or operational control by that formation.

Organisation and equipment

The combined-arms brigade currently has an estimated personnel strength of 3,483 and is organised into:

- Brigade headquarters and rear services element
- Three infantry battalions (truck-mobile)
- Light infantry battalion
- Tank battalion
- Two self-propelled artillery battalions



Combined-arms brigade, 1986.

- Mortar battalion
- Self-propelled anti-aircraft battalion
- Self-propelled multiple rocket launcher battery
- Mechanised reconnaissance company
- Signals company
- Maintenance company
- Chemical defence platoon

Brigade headquarters and rear services

The brigade is normally commanded by a major-general or senior colonel with a lieutenant-colonel or major as deputy commander. The brigade headquarters and rear services element have a strength of 208 (68 officers and 140 enlisted men) and are organised into:

Command element

Commander
Aide-de-camp
Driver

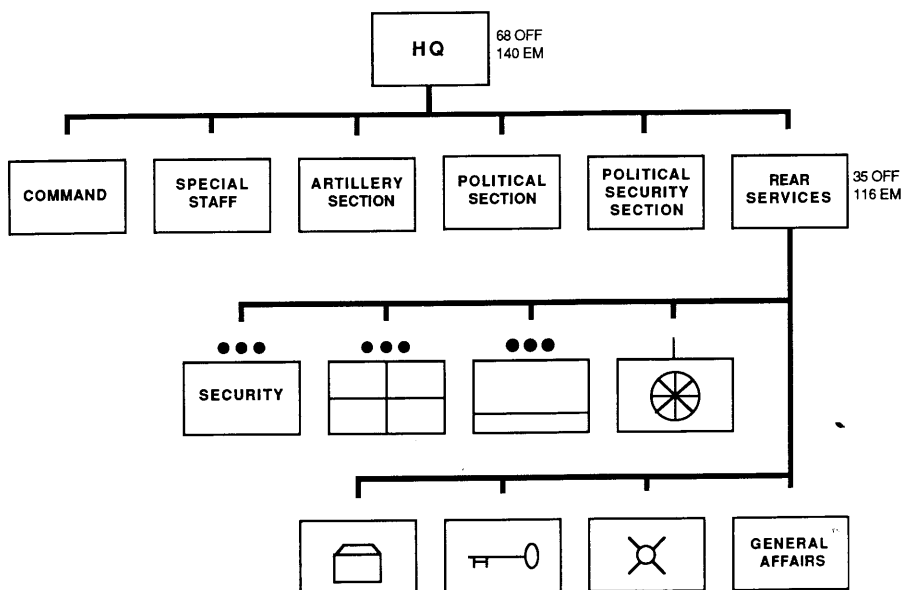
Headquarters element

Special staff section
Chief of Staff
Operations
Reconnaissance
Signals
Engineers
Personnel
General affairs
Artillery section
Chief of artillery

Staff
 Command platoon
 Political security section
 Political section
 Rear services element
 Deputy brigade commander—rear services
 Finance section
 Rations section
 Clothing section
 General affairs section
 Security/guard platoon
 Medical platoon
 Supply platoon
 Transport company

The combined-arms brigade commander is responsible for all basic decisions concerning the employment and welfare of the brigade. However, he concentrates primarily on the control of operations and delegates administrative responsibilities to the greatest possible extent. The Chief of Staff is the second-in-command and, together with the deputy brigade commander—rear services, is the only person authorised to act in the name of the commander. It is through his office that the commander transmits all his decisions. He commands the headquarters company and special staff, directs the work of all the staff officers and departments and usually counter-signs all operational orders to make them official. In close liaison with the commander is the political security officer who is charged with the responsibility for internal security and political activities throughout the brigade. He carefully checks the decisions of the brigade commander for fulfilment of directives from higher headquarters. Any

Brigade headquarters and rear services.



deviations or infractions of those orders are reported immediately to the Political Security Department whenever he deems it necessary. The deputy commander—rear services, controls supply, maintenance, transport, etc.

The chief of artillery exercises command and control over the brigade's organic and attached artillery and mortar assets. Additionally, he has certain ordinance maintenance responsibilities. The special staff includes the brigade's communications, reconnaissance and engineer officers who exercise command over the units of their respective branches. The political security section is subordinate to the Political Security Department and is responsible for the internal security of the brigade. This includes the location and arrest of anti-government elements, conducting background investigations, inspection and maintenance of security and the protection of military secrets.

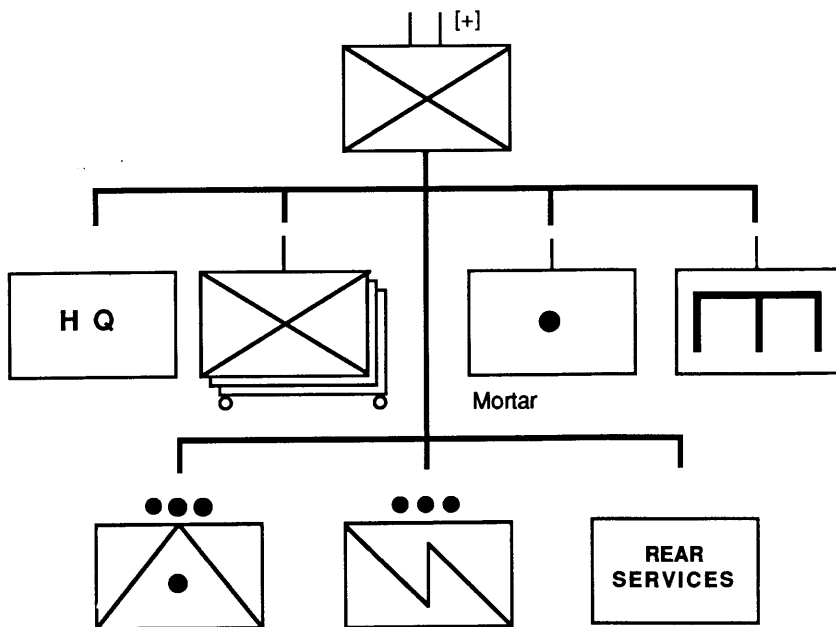
Infantry battalion (truck-mobile)

The infantry battalion is normally commanded by a lieutenant-colonel; companies are commanded by a major or captain. Each battalion has a strength of 521 (47 officers and 474 enlisted men) and is assessed as having nine 82mm mortars, two to four AT-3 Sagger ATGMs, four 107mm recoilless rifles, 39 RPG-2/7, an unknown number of SA-7 SAMs and either 16 long-bed or 30 small-cargo trucks. It is organised into:

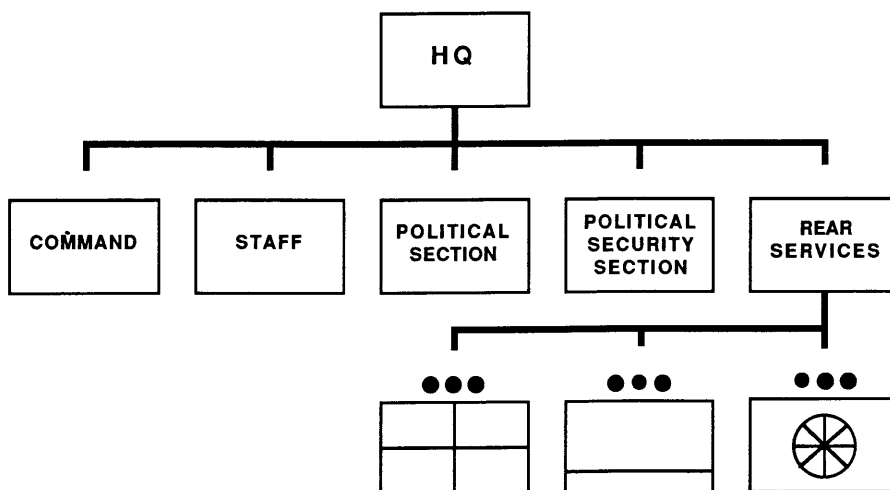
- Battalion headquarters
 - Command
 - Staff
 - Political security
 - Political
 - Rear services
 - Medical platoon
 - Supply platoon
 - Transport platoon
- Three infantry companies
 - Headquarters
 - Three rifle platoons
 - One HMG platoon
- Assault engineer company
 - Headquarters
 - Three engineer platoons
 - Three engineer squads
- Mortar battery
 - Headquarters
 - Three firing sections
- Anti-tank platoon
- Signals platoon

The infantry battalion is the basic tactical unit of the combined-arms brigade for continuous combat operations. As such it normally operates as a part of the brigade. Although the battalion is capable of limited independent operations, rarely will it be assigned a mission independent of that of the brigade.

The battalion differs from the standard KPA truck-mobile infantry battalion in the specialised training it receives (which concentrates on penetration, neutralisation and destruction of enemy fortified areas). It has a greater number of anti-tank weapons and the addition of a combat engineer company at battalion level.⁴ This organisation is "heavier" than comparable Soviet/



Infantry battalion (truck-mobile).



Infantry battalion (truck-mobile), headquarters and rear services.

Warsaw Pact infantry or motorised/mechanised-infantry battalions, although it is "lighter" than PRC and US mechanised infantry or Marine infantry battalions:

- Soviet motorised rifle bn (BMP) 432
- Soviet motorised rifle bn (BTR) 455

• KPA infantry bn	458
• KPA motorised/mechanised infantry bn	461
• PRC mechanised infantry battalion	490
• KPA truck-mobile infantry bn (C/A bde)	521
• PRC infantry battalion	682
• US Marine infantry bn	867
• US mechanised infantry bn	869

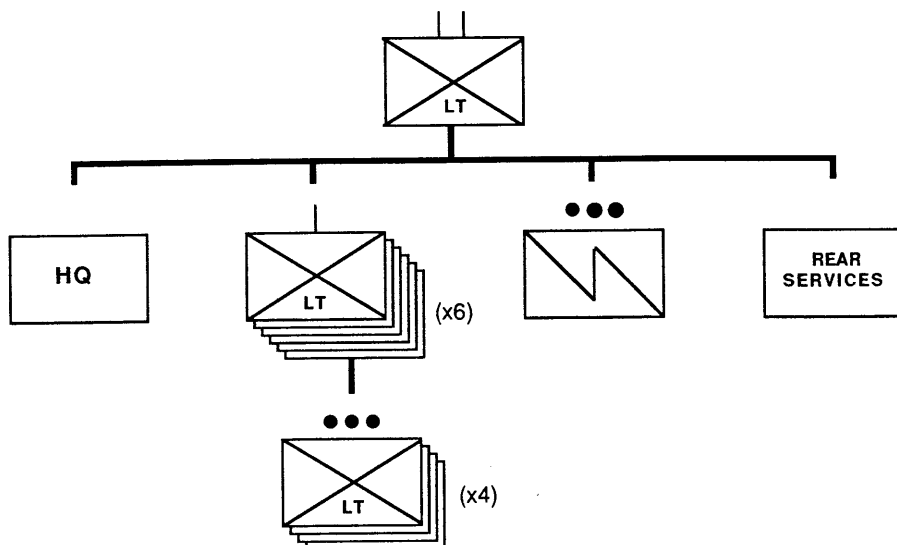
In conjunction with other elements of the brigade, the infantry battalion is well suited for operations that require the penetration of organised defensive positions and the seizure and consolidation of critical terrain. During defensive operations, and in coordination with other brigade elements, the infantry battalion occupies and organises the ground to repel attacks and destroy enemy penetrations.

The infantry battalion will seldom be employed without strong combined-arms support. Its firepower is enhanced by the presence of ex-Soviet ROKS-3 flamethrowers within the engineer platoons. Additional firepower augmentation may be realised by the attachment of a company of tanks or elements (typically a battery) from the self-propelled artillery battalions.

Light infantry battalion⁵

The light infantry battalion is believed to be commanded by a colonel, has a strength of 400 (36 officers and 364 enlisted men) and is assessed as having 12-20 60/82mm mortars, 20-30 RPG-2/7, four to six SA-7 and 9-12 AT-3 Sagger ATGMs or recoilless rifles. It is organised into:

Headquarters
Command
Staff



Light infantry battalion.

Political
Rear Services
Six light infantry companies
Four light infantry platoons
Signals platoon

The KPA follows the dictum that "one man in the rear of the enemy is worth ten men before him", the light infantry battalion provides the means of implementing this. Its commando/ranger characteristics provide the brigade commander with the capability to conduct infiltration, enveloping attacks and the seizure of significant terrain features along the brigade's route of advance.

Elements from the light infantry battalion provide the main forces for any envelopments attempted by the brigade. Additionally, light infantry teams augment the brigade's reconnaissance assets and have the capability to conduct extended operations deep within ROK territory. In this role they would be routinely attired in ROK uniforms or civilian clothing. If the combined-arms brigade is forced to assume a defensive posture or retreat, the light infantry battalion will function as a delaying force and then operate as guerrillas behind ROK/US lines.

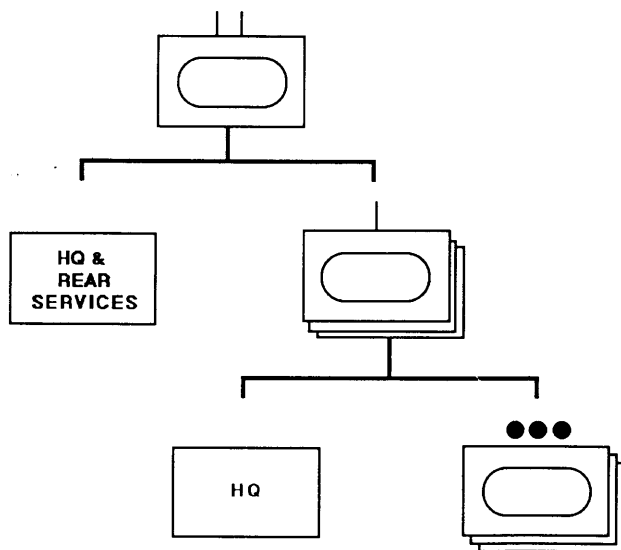
Tank battalion⁶

The tank battalion is normally commanded by a lieutenant-colonel, with companies commanded by a major or captain. It has a strength of 192 (29 officers and 163 enlisted men) and is assessed as having 31 T-54/55/Type 59 or T-34 medium tanks. The battalion is organised into a headquarters and rear services platoon and three tank companies.

The tank battalion's 31 tanks are distributed: one for the battalion commander and three companies of ten tanks each. Each tank company has one tank for the commander and three platoons of three tanks each.

Numerous changes have taken place within the KPA armoured forces since the early 1970s. The most significant of these was the receipt of 1,000(+) T-54/55/Type 59 medium tanks from the PRC and the Soviet Union during the period from 1971-1976. This enabled the KPA to replace the assault guns in all armoured formations with tanks and to standardise the armoured battalion's organisation. This caused US intelligence to change the unit designation from "armoured" to "tank" battalion. The previous standard armoured battalion was frequently a composite unit of assault guns and tanks, often including more than one type of each. This resulted in extreme logistical problems within the same battalion. The acquisition of the T-54/55/Type 59 tanks considerably simplified these logistical problems. Priority for these changes went first to the armoured divisions and regiments, then to the "forward" divisions and finally to the "rear area" divisions. As the number of available T-54/55/Type 59-equipped battalions increased those equipped with T-34s were transferred to the "rear area" divisions and "shock" brigades. By 1977 approximately 22% of the KPA's tank battalions were still partially equipped with the old reliable T-34 but these battalions were now made up of the T-34 exclusively. This eased logistics problems. Additionally, 18% of the KPA's tank battalions still had only two subordinate tank companies or a total of 21 tanks per battalion. This was especially true for the infantry/motorised-infantry divisions within "rear areas" corps.

Five years later, in 1982, this situation had changed significantly with the



Tank battalion.

present organisation and the T-54/55/Type 59 tanks being accepted as “standard” within the KPA. The majority of the T-34s were relegated to the Armour Command’s School Bureau and paramilitary reserve units. However, it is possible that the combined-arms brigades still retain some T-34s. As recently as 1982 possession of T-34s indicated that a formation was a combined-arms brigade.

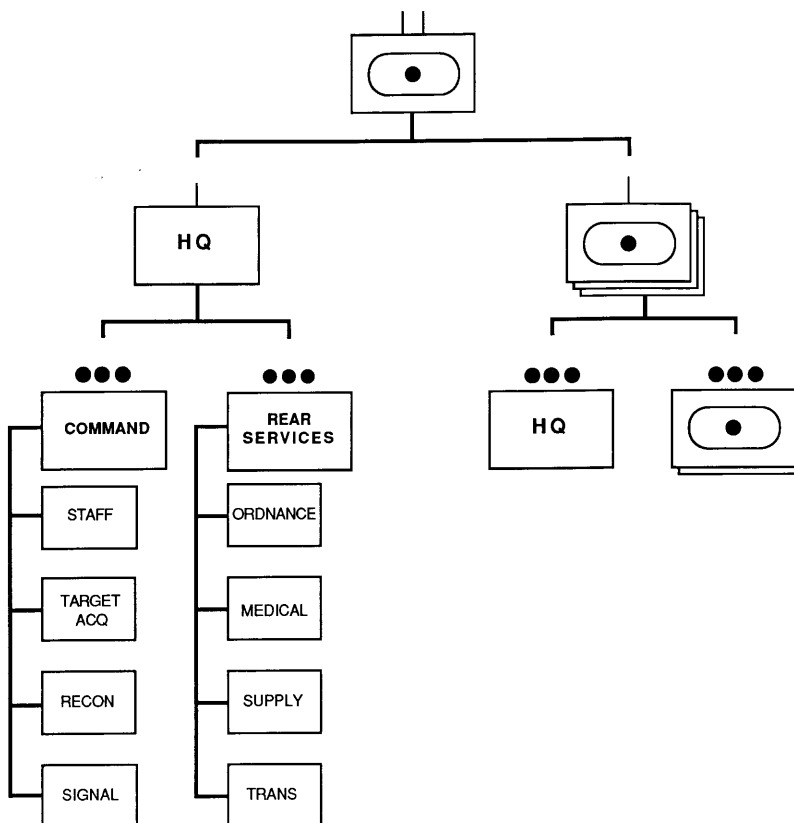
During offensive operations, the tank battalion may be employed as a single unit or in companies, to exploit any breeches, establish a breach through which the brigade’s infantry battalions could penetrate or to provide direct support to the assaulting infantry battalions. It is unlikely that individual tanks would be parcelled out as they were during the Fatherland Liberation War.

During defensive operations the tank battalion would normally be employed as a mobile reserve and for counterattacks. It would not normally be deployed to defend terrain. It would also be assigned a role within the brigade’s defensive fireplan. The KPA may also employ tanks in the indirect fire role.

Self-propelled artillery battalion

The self-propelled artillery battalion is normally commanded by a colonel, has a strength of 186 (30 officers and 156 enlisted men) and is assessed as having 12 self-propelled artillery pieces (M-1981/1977/1974), 22 trucks and seven RPG-2/7. It is organised into:

Headquarters and headquarters battery
 Command platoon
 Rear services platoon

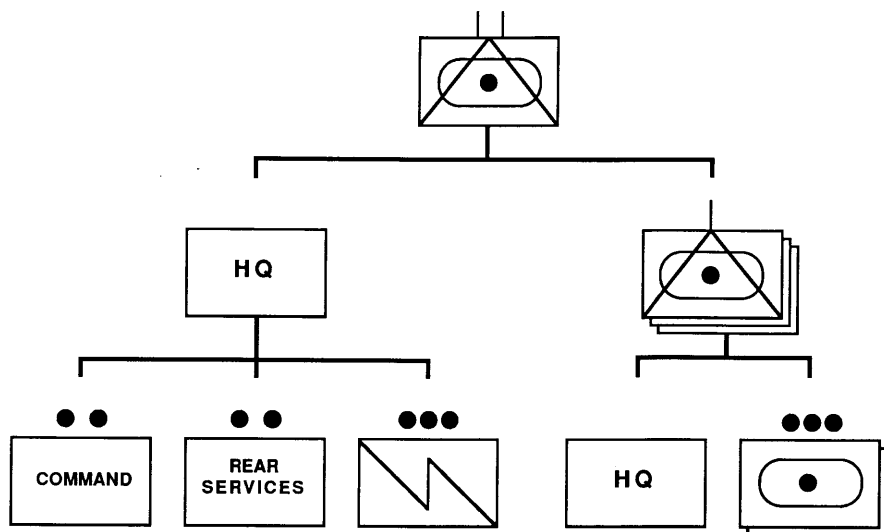


Self-propelled artillery battalion.

Three self-propelled artillery batteries
 Headquarters platoon
 Two firing platoons

The combined-arms brigades were previously organised with a single assault-gun battalion equipped with SU-100s. This assault-gun battalion was apparently replaced by the two self-propelled artillery battalions sometime during the early 1980s. The inclusion of two organic self-propelled artillery battalions, which are normally only found at divisional level or within independent artillery regiments, is an excellent indicator of the importance attached to the combined-arms brigades. It is not clear whether the battalion consists of 12 or 18 self-propelled artillery pieces. If there are 18 self-propelled pieces, each firing platoon would have three gun sections.

The KPA considers artillery to be the major supporting component of the combined-arms team. The KPA relies on a modified version of Soviet artillery doctrine. This doctrine differs from Soviet practice in that the Soviets frequently "overkill" targets or fire in areas where no target has developed whereas KPA artillery doctrine calls for all available artillery to give the support considered necessary for the attack by the artillery commander. His



Assault gun battalion.

estimate is based upon personal reconnaissance and the analysis of enemy capabilities based upon available intelligence information. The commander determines the quantity of artillery, including artillery and mortars of attached units, needed to support the operation. KPA artillery includes 120mm and 160mm mortars, multiple rocket launchers, assault guns, anti-aircraft artillery and conventional field artillery.⁷

The KPA normally deploys supporting artillery so that three quarters of its maximum range will be forward of the FEBA. However, when assigned an "escorting" mission, artillery will be deployed in well camouflaged positions approximately 800–1,200 metres from the FEBA. It is likely that the combined-arms brigades will employ the self-propelled artillery battalions in both roles.

Mortar battalion

The mortar battalion is normally commanded by either a colonel or lieutenant-colonel, has strength of 185 (30 officers and 155 enlisted men) and is assessed as having 12 120mm M-1943 mortars and 7 RPG-2/7. It is organised into:

Headquarters and headquarters battery

Command platoon

Rear services platoon

Three mortar batteries

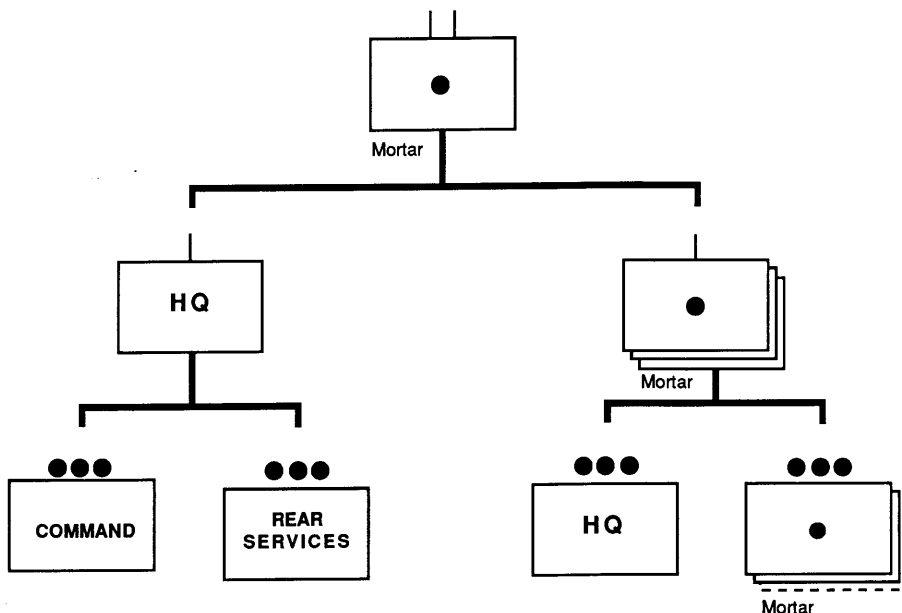
Headquarters platoon

Two mortar platoons

Two mortar squads

The battalion is equipped with the 120mm M-1943 mortar which, despite its age, still possesses formidable capabilities, having a range of 5,700 metres, a rate-of-fire of 9rpm and 15.4kg HE-Frag ammunition.

It is not known whether the battalion consists of 12 or 18 mortars. If there are 18 mortars, each battery would have three mortar platoons. The mortar bat-



Mortar battalion.

talion provides short-range artillery support for the brigade. Long-range and heavy artillery support is provided by the self-propelled artillery battalions or "corps artillery groups".

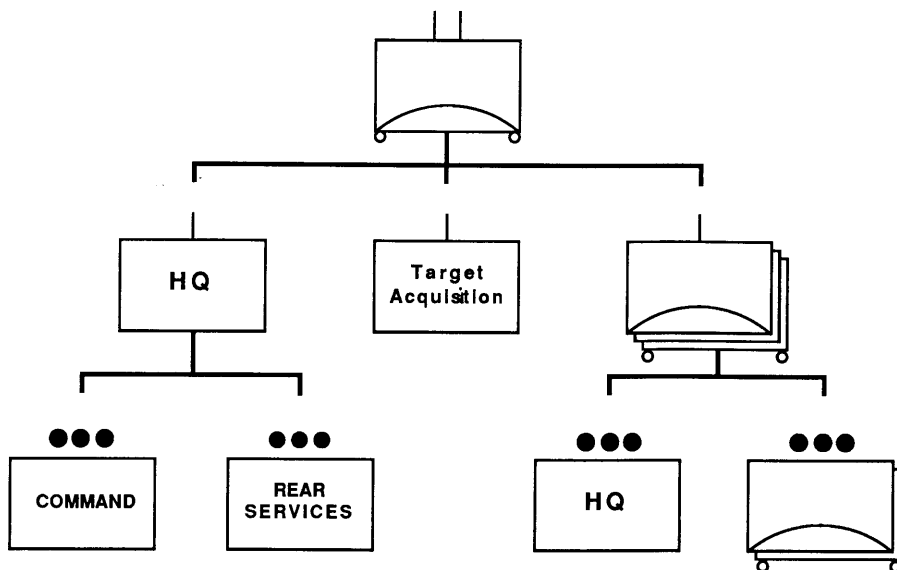
Mortars are usually emplaced on the reverse slopes of hills approximately 10–15 metres from the crest. This emplacement affords several advantages. The forward observer is within speaking distance of the gun crew. By placing himself on the gun target axis, he can make computations of deflection unnecessary when determining initial firing data. The positions afford the crew protection from flat-trajectory fire. Mortars will normally fire 10–20 rounds rapidly and then redeploy. Light mortars (60mm or 82mm) are frequently bracketed on to a target and then heavier (120mm or 160mm) mortars are brought in.⁸

Self-propelled anti-aircraft battalion

The self-propelled anti-aircraft artillery battalion is normally commanded by a lieutenant-colonel or major with batteries commanded by captains. The battalion has a strength of 215 (30 officers and 185 enlisted men) and is assessed as having 18 truck/APC-mounted 14.5mm ZPU-2, ZPU-4, or 37mm M-1939 anti-aircraft weapons and possibly three Whiff Can/Fire Can radars. It is organised into:

- Headquarters and rear services battery
- Target acquisition battery
- Three self-propelled anti-aircraft batteries
 - Headquarters platoon
 - Three self-propelled anti-aircraft platoons

The inclusion of an organic self-propelled anti-aircraft battalion, as opposed to the battery usually found within motorised and armoured brigades, is



Self-propelled anti-aircraft battalion.

another indication of the importance the KPA attaches to the combined-arms brigades. It is also an excellent indicator of their concern over ROK/US air pre-emption/air superiority.

It is not unusual for the self-propelled anti-aircraft battalion to be organised with anything from two to four firing batteries. The trucks and APCs most likely to be found mounting anti-aircraft weapons are the Sungri-58 (GAZ-51), Sungri-61 (GAZ-63) or Volvo F-88 trucks and the BTR-152 or Type 63 APCs.⁹

During both offensive and defensive operations the self-propelled anti-aircraft battalion is tasked with the close-in air defence of the brigade's positions, troop concentrations and lines of communication. Additionally, unlike ROK/US doctrine, KPA doctrine calls for the routine employment of anti-aircraft weapons in both "direct fire" and anti-tank roles in support of ground forces units. It is probable that one battery will be tasked with the protection of the brigade HQ and rear services units.

In relation to air defence operations during DMZ breach operations, it should be noted that in late 1985 the KPA supplemented their 270 SA-2 launchers with 32 new SA-3 launchers. While the majority of these SAMs are used to protect strategically important targets (P'yongyang, Wonsan, Hamhung, etc.), some may be employed to extend the SAM umbrella south to and possibly across the DMZ.

Self-propelled multiple rocket launcher battery

The self-propelled multiple rocket launcher battery is commanded by a captain or senior lieutenant, has a strength of 57 (5 officers and 52 enlisted men) and is assessed as having six truck-mounted 107mm Type 63/122mm BM-21/122mm BM-11 multiple rocket launchers and three RPG-2/7. It is organised into a headquarters and rear services platoon and three firing platoons.

There are some indications that this battery also includes one or two self-propelled 14.5mm ZPU-4 anti-aircraft guns. The MRL Battery is tasked with

providing area suppression, screening and harassing fires in support of the brigade. The MRL battery has as high priority targets ROK and US HQs, C³I assets and troop concentrations.

The BM-11 is the indigenously produced KPA equivalent to the Soviet BM-21. It differs primarily in the arrangement and number of firing tubes (30 instead of 40) and it is mounted on a DPRK/PRC-produced version of the Ural 375 truck. It is not known if BM-11 is the actual KPA type designation. However, it is the designation used by the Israelis for these MRLs which they captured from the PLO during the 1982 fighting in Lebanon.¹⁰

Reconnaissance company

The reconnaissance company is normally commanded by a captain, has a strength of 40 (5 officers and 35 enlisted men) and is assessed as having three PT-76/Type 63 amphibious light tanks, six APC/scout cars and three RPG-2/7. It is organised into a headquarters and rear services platoon, a light tank platoon and two reconnaissance platoons.

The primary task of the reconnaissance company is to provide timely and accurate intelligence to the brigade commander, with terrain reconnaissance being a high priority. It is not unusual for the brigade's engineer officer to accompany the reconnaissance company to provide an on-the-spot analysis of all terrain characteristics. This also facilitates the avoidance or removal of any natural or man-made barriers. Additionally, the reconnaissance company conducts ambushes as the need or opportunity arises. It is assisted in these roles by the light infantry battalion.

Signals company

The signals company is normally commanded by a captain or senior lieutenant, has a strength of 74 (5 officers and 69 enlisted men), contains three RPG-2/7 and is organised into:

Headquarters and staff platoon

Staff

- Maintenance squad

- Switchboard squad

- Message centre squad

- Rear services

Radio platoon

- Eight radio squads

Wire/telephone platoon

- Five Wire/telephone squads

The signals company is tasked with providing both radio and wire/telephone communications for the brigade HQ, maintenance and support of all the brigade's communications equipment and uninterrupted communications during all combat operations. Communications responsibility, while a command function, is delegated by the brigade commander to the brigade's communications officer. Battalion commanders are held personally responsible for maintaining communications with the brigade HQ and subordinate units.

KPA signals doctrine is closely based upon that of the Soviet Army. Wire is the primary means of communication because of its inherent advantages of security and economy. All other means of communication are secondary and

radios, particularly, are used less often than in the US and ROK armies. Radios, however, are the primary means of communication in fast moving situations and for reconnaissance, light infantry and tank units. In addition to radio and wire/telephone communications, the KPA makes extensive use of messengers, flags, flares, bugles, etc.

COMSEC is stressed at all levels and all radio communications must be encoded. KPA commanders actively practise communications deception, going to great lengths to prevent ROK/US SIGINT/COMINT operations from being successful. The possibility exists that the signals company has a very limited COMINT capability.

Typical signals equipment includes K-10 and PK-10 switchboards and R-113, R-108, Model 308, E-459, 9-RS, 12RP, 12RTM, 13-R, A-7-A and RBM-1 radios.

Maintenance company

The maintenance company is normally commanded by a captain or senior lieutenant, has a strength of 71 (6 officers and 65 enlisted men) and is assessed as having one to three Type-59 BTS-2 ARVs and four RPG-2/7. It is organised into:

Headquarters and rear services section
AFV maintenance platoon
Ordnance maintenance platoon
Motor vehicle platoon
Recovery platoon

The maintenance company is tasked with the forward repair of all the brigade's equipment and vehicles. KPA doctrine allows for only the simplest repairs to be undertaken during operations; thus the unit provides only emergency field repairs and routine maintenance during combat.

Chemical defence platoon

The chemical defence platoon is normally commanded by a senior lieutenant and has a strength of 25 (1 officer and 24 enlisted men). It is responsible for detecting, analysing and marking areas of chemical and radiological contamination. It is probable that the platoon would either operate with the reconnaissance company or be attached to the brigade HQ.

Typical chemical equipment includes Model PKhR and UPI detection kits, Model DP-1A, DP-1B and DP-62 survey meters and RDP-3 decontamination equipment.

Future organisational developments

The combined-arms brigades as currently organised possess a number of shortcomings. The majority of these are related to obsolescent, though capable, weapon systems. It should be recognised, however, that the DPRK has a significant and improving indigenous arms production capability and they are taking steps to remedy these deficiencies. Along with these steps the Soviet Union has recently resumed significant arms deliveries to the DPRK. These events may allow future combined-arms brigades to develop by addressing the following:

- The enhancement of mobility, firepower and survivability by converting the

infantry battalions (truck-mobile) into mechanised units equipped with the Type 63 APC.

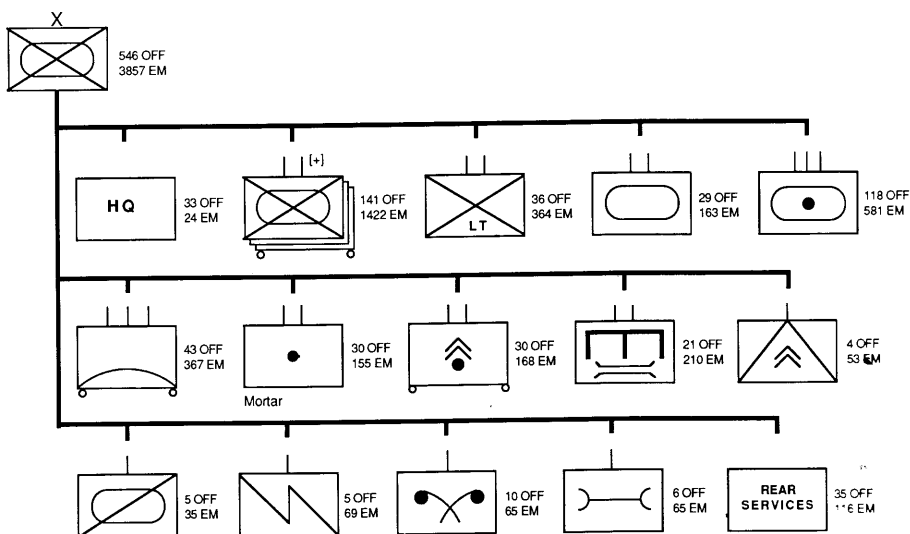
- The improvement of the ability to counter the medium and long-range tank threat by the attachment of an ATGM Battery (AT-3) at brigade level. Alternatively, the number of ATGMs within the infantry battalions could be increased.
- The standardisation of the tank battalion on a more modern tank. Candidates include the Type 59, Type 59/Modified, Type 69-11 or T-62 medium tanks, or possibly the new indigenously produced M-1985 light tank.
- The reorganisation and re-equipping of the self-propelled anti-aircraft battalion as a regiment with a more modern system, possibly a ZSU-23-4-type system, to reduce the concern over ROK/US air pre-emption/air superiority. The infantry battalions could receive larger quantities of the SA-7.
- The restructuring of its integral artillery units into an artillery regiment with an MRL component of battalion size and its support elements.
- The addition of either an AVBL platoon to the tank battalion or the formation of a light assault bridge company/battalion at brigade level to reduce dependence upon the corps/GHQ-level river crossing assets particularly. Bridging would be an even greater asset during the monsoon season.

Assuming these changes were to occur, the combined-arms brigade of 1990 would have a personnel strength of approximately 4,403 and be significantly more capable than it is today.

Deployment

Since the early 1980s all five combined-arms brigades have been headquartered and deployed within VII Corps in the Namdae-ch'on (40°17'N 128°16'E) area, near Kuum-ni. Previously they were deployed around the town of

Combined-arms brigade 1990 (postulated).



Hwangsuwon-ni (40°42N 128°09E). The deployment near Kuum-ni is indicative of the attention the KPA is paying to historically vulnerable amphibious landing areas and also facilitates the redeployment of the brigades to the DMZ via the Hamhung—Wonsan—P'yonggang railway/highway systems.¹²

The 1984 reorganisation and redeployment of the KPA does not appear to have effected the status of the combined-arms brigades to any great extent. In fact, a number of regular KPA infantry/motorised infantry divisions were reconstituted as brigades (making them even more similar to the combined-arms brigades). The surplus units resulting from this reorganisation were incorporated at corps level.

Offensive operations¹³

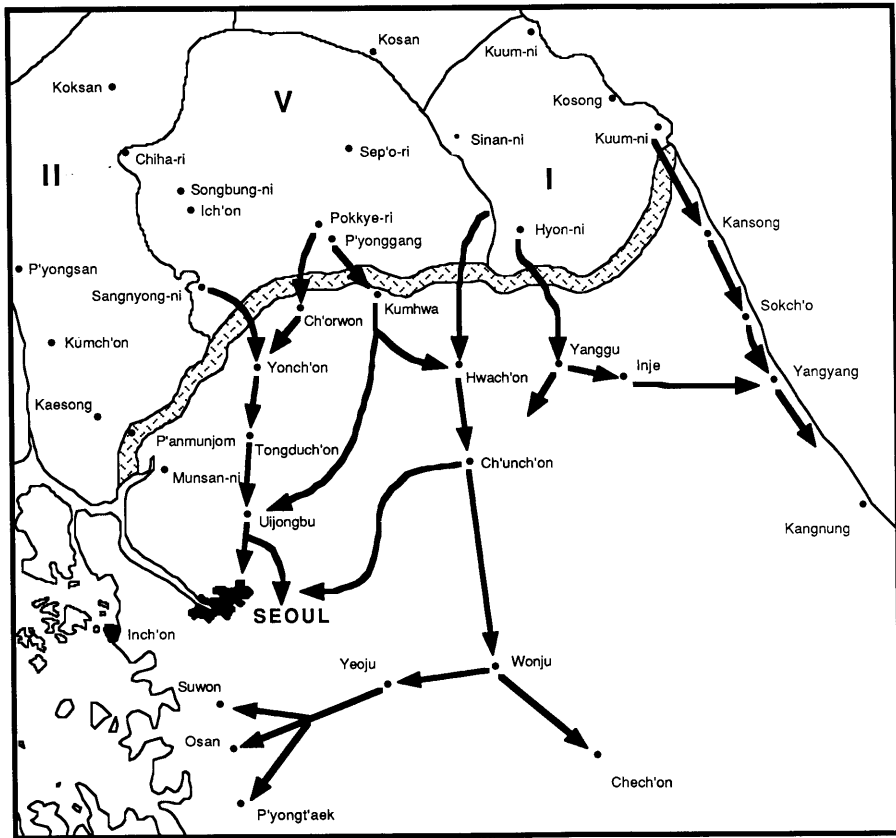
The actual number of combined-arms brigades committed to a KPA invasion of the ROK is dependent upon a number of factors. First among these is the KPA's estimate of the length of any renewed conflict and the speed of a US reaction. This estimate would determine the threat to the DPRK coastline from a ROK/US amphibious invasion. It is likely that the KPA estimates that with the mobilisation of its paramilitary reserve units and the length of time it would take before the ROK/US forces could mount a significant amphibious threat they could commit at least four, if not all five, combined-arms brigades to a DMZ assault. A reasonable estimate would thus include the following employment: one brigade would initially remain committed to coastal defence in the Namdae-ch'on area, three brigades would be tasked with the DMZ assault within V Corps and one brigade either within I Corps or held as a second echelon to be deployed against secondary ROK/US defensive lines.

I Corps The terrain in this area is ideally suitable for regular infantry supported by light infantry units in the interior mountains and amphibious light infantry along the coast. Therefore one combined-arms brigade could reasonably be expected to operate in this area. Its mission would be to lead the attack on the Samch'ok area. This attack would originate from either the Kuum-ni or Hyon-ni areas. A Kuum-ni area operation would aim to breach the DMZ along the narrow coastal plain and lead the attack along the Kuum-ni—Samch'ok route. Whereas an operation originating from the Hyon-ni area would attack along the Yanggu—Inje—Yangyang route. The object of such an attack would be to envelop ROKA units in the Kansong—Sokch'o area.

II Corps Due to the terrain restrictions imposed by the Imjin River and the Han River estuary, the long distance from the combined-arms brigades home bases in the northeast and by the congestion likely to be caused by the large number of III Corps strategic reserve units (105th and Koksan Tank Divisions, 1st Mechanised Infantry Division, etc.) moving towards Seoul from the P'yongyang area, it is unlikely that any combined-arms brigade operations would take place in II Corps area.

V Corps Since I and II Corps areas would see limited combined-arms brigade operations, V Corps is likely to be the primary area of operations. The combined-arms brigades would lead the attack across the DMZ and possibly south along these important routes:

- P'yonggang—Kumhwa or Ch'orwon—Uijongbu—Seoul.



Combined-arms brigade employment.

- Sangnyong-Ni—Yonch'on—Tongduch'on—Uijongbu—Seoul.
- Ch'unch'on—Wonju—(across the upper Han River)—Yeoju (drive west along the Kangnung Expressway (Route 4))—Osan and Suwon (this would complete a double envelopment of the Seoul area).

Operations in any of these areas would be conducted in concert with amphibious light infantry landings along the coast or airborne light infantry landings behind ROK/US defensive positions. These airborne and amphibious light infantry units would seek to interdict ROK/US forces and to secure tactically important terrain features such as bridges, crossroads, etc., ahead of the advancing combined-arms brigades.

The DMZ assault mission requires that the combined-arms brigades absorb the high casualties normally associated with deliberate assaults, thus enabling second-echelon units to enter combat at nearly full strength. It is quite probable that the combined-arms brigades would suffer upwards of 50% losses during the opening stages of any new conflict. As the war continued the remnants of these units would most likely be reconstituted into a smaller

number of combined-arms brigades. These reconstituted brigades would then be used to breach new ROK/US defensive positions which were too difficult or costly for regular ground forces to overcome. If such combat-intensive missions continued, the combined-arms brigades would have suffered such severe losses within a short period of time that it would be impractical to reconstitute them. In such a situation the remnants are likely to either be reconstituted as independent coastal-defence units or be attached to the remaining combined-arms brigades or the mechanised infantry or armoured divisions.

Combat procedures

The combat procedures typically employed by the combined-arms brigade during assault operations are similar to those of standard KPA units. Standard KPA operational doctrine calls for the employment of three echelons—first, second, and third (reserve). These three echelons would normally be organised as follows: first echelon—two infantry battalions (+), second echelon—one infantry battalion (–), and third echelon—one tank company (–) and one infantry company (–). The third echelon (reserve) is used for rear area and flank protection, to repel counterattacks, for penetration and exploitation and to intensify the attack. This three echelon organisation provides a tactical depth that allows for a degree of flexibility in exploiting any penetration. At the time of commitment, each echelon and unit is assigned a specific mission and direction of attack.

The combined-arms brigade will typically attack on a front of 1,500–2,000 metres (depending upon terrain considerations) with first echelon infantry battalions (+) having a frontage of 400–600 metres. The second echelon infantry battalions (–) will follow behind the first at a distance of approximately 1,000 metres. The third echelon (reserve) would be positioned 1,000 metres behind the second. The brigade commander would be located anywhere from the forward battalion CP to the brigade CP during the attack. Battalion commanders normally take positions behind their forward observation posts.

The attack begins with artillery fire upon all known targets 10–30 minutes prior to the assault in an attempt to break up command and observation posts, neutralise support weapons and open gaps in defensive lines. A final intense concentration of artillery fire accompanied by the firing of all available support weapons, including infantry automatic weapons, precedes the actual assault. During this phase, elements from the light infantry battalion attack flanks, command posts, communications centres, artillery sites, supply depots and airfields. The light infantry units would also attempt to penetrate as deeply as possible into ROK territory, establishing roadblocks to isolate defending units and ambush reinforcements. When a light infantry unit arrives at its designated ambush position, it will split into two elements. One will begin construction of a main fortified position while the other will establish secondary and anti-tank positions.

The infantry battalions would establish special assault units within each of their companies. These units are tasked with the removal of mines and obstacles in front of the battalion's line of attack. They consist of an assault team, sapper team and a support team. The assault team, equipped with machine-

guns and assault rifles, attacks the ROK/US positions while the sapper team, consisting of a demolitions element and anti-tank element, clears wire entanglements, abatis, mines and bunkers. The support team is armed with recoilless rifles and machine guns and may also carry ammunition and equipment for the other teams. These assault units begin the actual assault with the remainder of the battalion following in their wake.

When the infantry battalions achieve multiple penetrations in a given sector the artillery transfers its fire to appropriate targets in the rear and on the flanks of the ROK/US positions. This transfer is executed either on a signal of the brigade commander or as directed in the operations plan. It is intended to continue the neutralisation of ROK/US units and prevent counterattack, to isolate defending units, prevent reinforcement and supply and to deny the use of logical routes of withdrawal.

When each echelon attains its objective it continues to search for weak points so that the attack may be continued. Doctrine dictates continued independent pursuit until all enemy forces are destroyed. In the event of a successful assault, artillery continues to support the action by prompt removal forward. Occupation of the enemy front lines is the signal for the forward displacement of direct-support artillery. Usually, a third of available artillery moves to continue support fire.

As opposed to standard KPA tactical doctrine, which calls for attacking forces to bypass or envelop strongpoints or areas of resistance, leaving them to be engaged by second-echelon units who are assigned to destroy them, the combined-arms brigade is tasked with destruction of all such resistance within its small area of responsibility, the rupture of the defence and the creation of a gap which can be exploited by the follow-on forces. To facilitate this each battalion establishes a number of mopping-up units. These units are frequently supported by DMZ Police and light infantry personnel, often attired in ROKA uniforms, who establish roadblocks along ROK/US lines of communication to prevent withdrawal. These personnel then initiate a systematic search and reduction of all ROK/US positions. Special emphasis is placed upon the capture of officers, C'I equipment and "special weapons" (chemical, ADMs, etc.).

As the penetration continues, elements from the tank battalion (and possibly the SP artillery battalions) are committed to either intensify the assault or for exploitation. The tactical employment of these units is determined by the brigade commander according to the tactical situation and terrain conditions. The tank battalion is normally employed in company-sized elements in support of the infantry battalions, with each tank company having a frontage of 200-400 metres and a depth of 200-1,000 metres with a distance of 30-50 metres between each vehicle. Although the employment of tanks or SP artillery in Korea is heavily dependent upon terrain considerations, it should be remembered that during the Fatherland Liberation War the KPA was able to employ small tank units (one to three tanks) in terrain considered to be impassable to tanks.

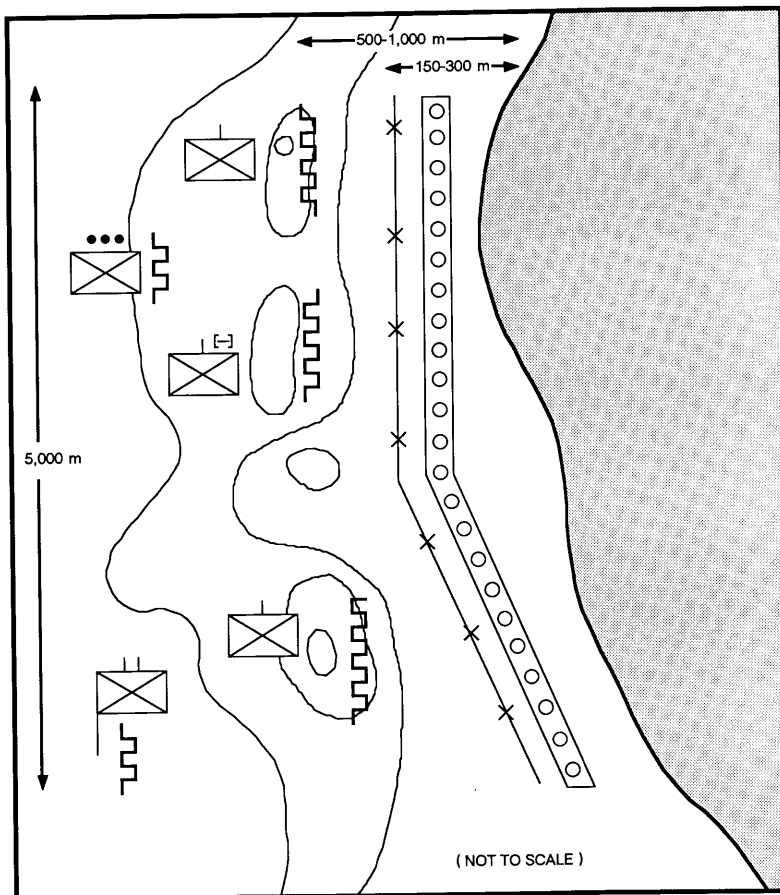
Once the combined-arms brigade has achieved its assigned objectives, follow-on forces, normally consisting of a reinforced infantry division, pass through and continue the attack. The combined-arms brigades are then tasked with securing and widening the breakthrough until relieved. Alternatively, the combined-arms brigades, if they still possess significant combat strength, could continue to lead the attack south.

Defensive operations

When conducting defensive operations within the "forward" corps the combined-arms brigades function as a mobile reserve or counterattack force. In which case they would be directly subordinate to either a corps or divisional HQ. When conducting defensive operations within the "rear area" corps these brigades would be assigned to coastal or rear area defence.

In the coastal defence role the brigade can be responsible for frontages varying from 25–100km, depending upon the suitability of the coast to amphibious landings.¹⁴ The brigade's subordinate units do not normally occupy static coastal defence fortifications but deployed just behind such fortifications so as to be able to move rapidly to a threatened area. When deployed in static coastal defence fortifications, an infantry battalion from a combined-arms brigade, has a frontage of approximately 5,000 metres with all three of its companies forward in defensive positions and a reserve of one platoon. Usually these positions will be 500–1,000 metres from the high-water-line and behind

Static coastal defence dispositions.



wire, minie-fields and other beach obstacles which are concentrated some 150–300 metres from the high-water-line.

The coastal defence mission of the combined-arms brigades reflects the KPA's efforts to deny any future landings of the magnitude experienced during the Fatherland Liberation War. Since the war the KPA has gone to great lengths to develop and expand a diversified coastal defence system. This system includes a large number of pre-constructed weapons positions and beach obstacles, the integration of coastal defence missiles and radar-directed artillery; and development and deployment of the combined-arms brigades; etc. The current deployment of the combined-arms brigades at Namdae-ch'on indicates that particular attention is being paid to historically vulnerable amphibious landing areas.¹⁵

Notes

1 Defense Intelligence Agency. "The North Korean Combined Arms Brigades at Namdae-ch'on", DDB-1100-407-83, May 1983; "North Korean Armed Forces"; "Order-of-Battle Handbook: Chinese Communist Forces, Korea and The North Korean Army"; and Bermudez Jr., Joseph S. "North Korea's Combined Arms Brigades", *Combat Weapons*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring 1986, pp. 26–29 & 89–93.

2 See Appendix B for more complete unit histories.

3 The KPA is believed to have first deployed coastal defence missiles in 1972. These missiles may have been the PRC produced version of the Soviet S-2, the HV-2.

4 The possibility exists that instead of a battalion-level engineer company, each infantry company has an organic engineer platoon.

5 "North Korea's Light Infantry Brigades", pp. 1176–78.

6 US Army. "North Korean Armor Force", SRD-25-S/NORFORN-76, 17 May 1977; and Bermudez Jr., Joseph S. "The Tank Battalion of the North Korean People's Army", *Armor*, November–December 1986, Vol. XCV, No. 6, pp. 16–20.

7 Schnabel, Capt. J.D. "North Korean Artillery—Part 1: Background and Organisation", *Field Artillery Journal*, May–June 1978, pp. 18–23; Schnabel, Capt. J.D. "North Korean Artillery—Part 2: Tactics", *Field Artillery Journal*, May–June 1978, pp. 22–26; "North Korean People's Army Operations", Chapter 7; and "North Korean Armed Forces", pp. 23–25.

8 *Ibid.*

9 There are some indications that the KPA has recently acquired the Soviet ZSU-23-4 and/or has mounted the 14.5mm ZPU-4 or 37mm M-1939 (with a Fire Can radar) on the chassis of a T-54/55/Type 59 medium tank.

10 The Israelis captured examples of these MRLs mounted on Japanese produced trucks.

11 The M-1985 light tank mounts both a Type 63 85mm gun and an AT-3 Sagger ATGM.

12 "The North Korean Combined-Arms Brigades at Namdae-ch'on", p. 1.

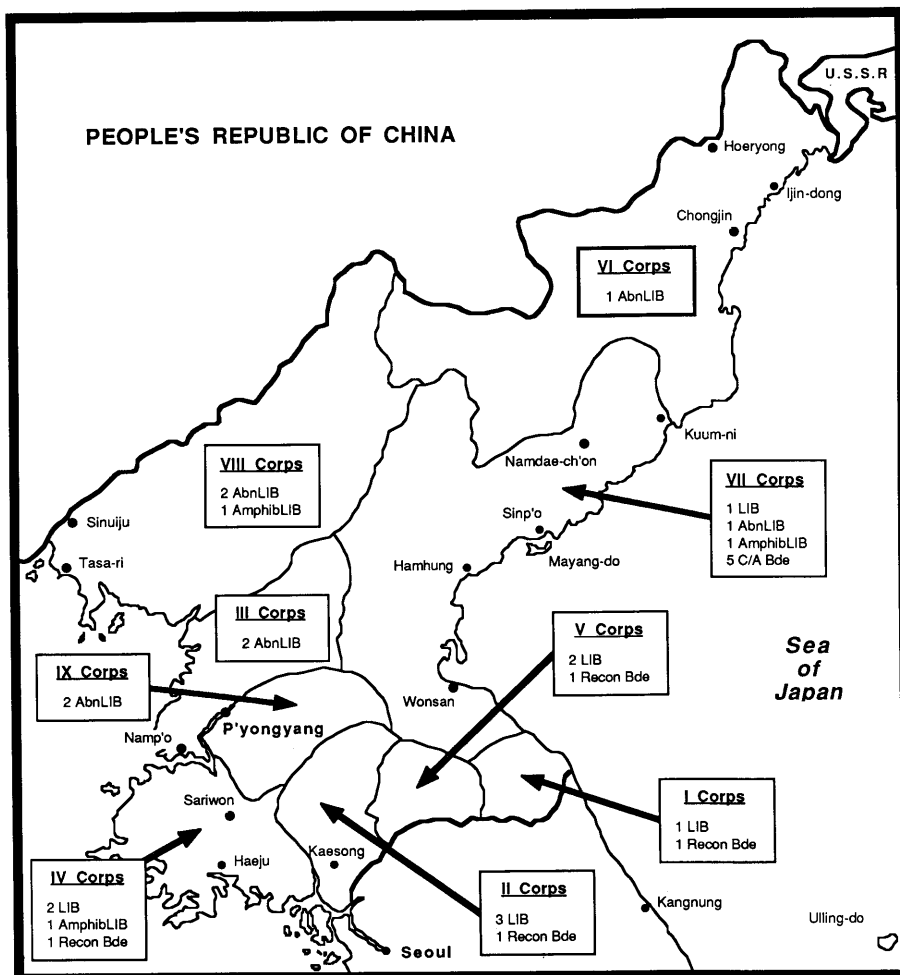
13 This estimate is based upon the assumption that the KPA would pursue a "quick war" strategy and would not initially attempt to enter Seoul. Instead it would envelop the capital by attacking east of the city and then swing west towards the coast, south of Inch'on. Here it would join with amphibious light infantry units which had previously established a beach-head. Only when this is completed would the KPA attempt to enter Seoul. Simultaneously, the KPA would attack as quickly as possible (as they did in 1950) south and east along the Taejon—Taegu—Pusan and Taejon—Chonju—Kwanju routes and south on the east coast following the Kuum-ni—Samch'ok route.

14 During the last year of the Fatherland Liberation War and in the years immediately following the signing of the Armistice Agreement, the mechanised artillery brigades (the forerunners of the combined-arms brigades) were assigned coastal frontages ranging from 30–220km. Those nearest the front had the shortest frontages while those furthest away had the longest. For information on KPA coastal defence operations during the Fatherland Liberation War see: "North Korean Coastal Defenses", *ONI Review*, October 1954, Vol. 9, No. 10, pp. 407–410.

15 "The North Korean Combined Arms Brigades at Namdae-ch'on", p. 1.

Appendix A

Special Purpose Forces order of battle



Special Purpose Forces order of battle.

Special Purpose Forces strength

9	Light infantry brigades	34,200
8	Airborne light infantry brigades ¹	30,000
4	Reconnaissance brigades	16,800
5	Combined-arms brigades	17,500
3	Amphibious light infantry brigades ²	9,000
35	Divisional light infantry battalions	14,000
Total		121,500

Special Purpose Forces brigades

Type	Corps									Total
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	
Light infantry	1	3	—	2	2	—	1	—	—	9
Airborne	—	—	2	—	—	1	1	2	2	8
Combined-arms	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	—	5
Reconnaissance	1	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	4
Amphibious	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	1	—	3
Total	2	4	2	4	3	1	8	3	2	29

Special Purpose Forces battalions

Type	Corps									Total
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	
Light infantry	14	32	23	27	23	13	31	22	20	205
Reconnaissance	10	10	—	10	10	—	—	—	—	40
Total	24	42	23	37	33	13	31	22	20	245

Deployment

I Corps (forward):

U/I Light infantry brigade
61st Reconnaissance Brigade

II Corps (forward):

U/I Light infantry brigade Sohung
U/I Light infantry brigade Koksan
32nd Light Infantry Brigade
62nd Reconnaissance Brigade

III Corps:

38th Airborne Light Infantry Brigade
U/I Airborne light infantry brigade Maengsan

IV Corps:

U/I Light infantry brigade

U/I	Light infantry brigade	Kuwolsan
60th	Reconnaissance Brigade	
U/I	Amphibious light infantry brigade	Hakkye
V Corps (forward):		
75th	Light Infantry Brigade	
80th	Light Infantry Brigade	
63rd	Reconnaissance Brigade	
VI Corps:		
43rd	Airborne Light Infantry Brigade	
VII Corps:		
U/I	Light infantry brigade	
87th	Airborne Light Infantry Brigade	
U/I	Combined-arms brigade	Namdae-ch'on
U/I	Combined-arms brigade	Namdae-ch'on
U/I	Combined-arms brigade	Namdae-ch'on
U/I	Combined-arms brigade	Namdae-ch'on
U/I	Combined-arms brigade	Namdae-ch'on
U/I	Amphibious light infantry brigade	Wonsan
VIII Corps:		
U/I	Airborne light infantry brigade	Kanggye
U/I	Airborne light infantry brigade	Hutch'on
U/I	Amphibious light infantry bridage	Tasa-ri
IX Corps:		
16th	Airborne Light Infantry Brigade	
17th	Airborne Light Infantry Brigade	

Notes

1 Includes the 43rd Airborne Light Infantry Brigade which has a strength of 3,400.

2 Includes amphibious light infantry headquarters subordinate to Navy Command Headquarters, and supporting units.

Appendix B

Selected unit histories 1949–1956¹

20th Brigade

The origins of this brigade are obscure since there are no reports concerning this unit until mid-1953. However, it is possible that with the reorganisation of the mechanised artillery brigades in mid-1952 the KPA activated this brigade. In August 1953 the 20th Brigade was attached to V Corps and deployed in the Chongjin area with the mission of coastal defence. During July–August 1955 the 20th Brigade underwent a major reorganisation and re-equipment. By January 1956 V Corps had moved forward and its place was taken by II Corps, Third Army Group. During this redeployment the 20th Brigade remained behind and became attached to II Corps. It remained deployed within the Chongjin area and was responsible for the defence of the coast from Songjin to the USSR border. Its commander during this period was Major General Kang Tae Mu.

21st Brigade

A reorganisation of the 23rd Mechanised Artillery Brigade into an “ordinary” brigade in June 1952 resulted in the activation of the 21st Brigade. By the end of 1952 this brigade was deployed on a defence mission in the Hwanghae Province. It was composed of three infantry battalions, one artillery battalion and one transport battalion. During August–September 1955 the brigade underwent a major reorganisation and re-equipment. By January 1956 the brigade was attached to IV Corps, Second Army Group, and remained in Hwanghae Province. It was responsible for coastal defence from Haeju to Changyon with its HQ near Ongjin. During this period it was commanded by Senior Colonel Tae Kil.

22nd Brigade

The origins of this brigade are also obscure since there are no reports concerning this unit until mid-1953. However, it is possible that with the reorganisation of the mechanised artillery brigades in mid-1952 the KPA activated this brigade. In August 1953 the 22nd Brigade was attached to V Corps and deployed along the eastern coast near Tanch'on. During August–September 1955 the

brigade underwent a major reorganisation and re-equipment. By January 1956 the brigade had been redeployed forward and attached to VII Corps, First Army Group, where it was responsible for coastal defence from Changjon to Songjin with its HQ at Tongch'on. Its commander during this period was Major General Cho Kwan.

23rd Brigade

The 23rd Brigade was originally formed in July 1949 as the 956th Independent Marine Regiment under the 599th Unit, Naval Headquarters, at Chinnamp'o. In August 1950 the regiment was redesignated the 23rd (239th) Marine Brigade at Chinnamp'o. At this time, battalions of the brigade were sent to the Ongjin, Haeju, Kunsan and Kwangju areas. Following the UNC advance in September 1950, remnants of the brigade withdrew to North Korea and began reorganising and training in the Yongwon area northeast of Tockch'on.

In mid-December 1950 the brigade, still understrength and poorly equipped, started moving south through Maengsan, Vangdok, Koksan, Singye and Sariwon arriving in the Haeju area in mid-January 1951. Battalion elements of the brigade then took up positions in the southwestern coastal areas of Hwanghae Province from Changdan south through Ongjin and east through Haeju to the vicinity of Changyon to the north. Here the brigade began preparing beach defences while also training and adding personnel and equipment. In February 1951 the brigade was placed under the command of VI Corps which had then arrived in the area.

In April 1951 the brigade extended its zone of responsibility further to the north to the vicinity of Ullyul. In late May 1951 the 36th Division, VI Corps, which was located in the Haeju area, was disbanded and the 63rd Regiment of the division was integrated into the brigade. At this time, the brigade was apparently redesignated a division, at least for a short period.

When VI Corps moved to the east sector in August 1951, the brigade remained behind and became attached to I Corps which had assumed responsibility for the area. Then in late November 1951 when I Corps also moved to the east sector, the brigade again remained in the area and became subordinate to IV Corps which although located north of the Taedong River was then apparently also responsible for the southwest coast of Hwanghae Province.

Although the brigade may have been redesignated a division in May of 1951, it was again redesignated as a brigade and underwent some reorganisation during the summer of 1951. At this time the brigade was commanded by Major General Oh Pack Yong, former commander of 8th Division. Although the brigade was redesignated as the 23rd Mechanised Artillery Brigade in October 1951, it retained its mission of coastal defence. The brigade was extremely active during October 1951–March 1952 in the KPA west coast "island-hopping campaign".

This "island-hopping campaign" consisted of a number of amphibious and shore-to-shore (i.e. movement across the mud flats) assaults on west coast islands held by UNC forces. The first major assault came on 9 October when approximately 600 troops conducted an amphibious assault on the Korea Bay island of Sinmi Do using sanpans and other small craft. This initial assault force was later reinforced by troops arriving across the mud flats. As a result of these actions, the island was evacuated by UNC forces three days later, on

12 October. On the evening of 6 November, KPA units attacked and capture the small islands of Ka-do and Tan-do by amphibious assault. These islands were subsequently used to provide artillery support and jump-off points for the successful 30 November amphibious assault on the island of Taehwa-do. These actions were accompanied by further shore-to-shore assaults which seized six small coastal islands in Haeju Man. In mid-December, between the 16th and 18th, a force of 600 troops, believed to be from the 23rd, assaulted and captured two small islands inshore of Sok To Island in the mouth of the Taedong River. Following this last assault UNC naval forces made a concerted effort to prevent any other such occurrences. As a result of these efforts there were no further assaults for several months until, in March 1952, the 23rd attempted a number of assaults across the mud flats of Haeju Man, against Yongmae Do. These raids were unsuccessful due to overwhelming UNC naval firepower. With the failure of these assaults, the west coast island-hopping campaign came to a close and the 23rd concerned itself primarily with coastal defence, only occasionally conducting small island raids.²

In June 1952 it was redesignated once again as the 23rd Brigade after supplying organic elements to the newly formed 21st Brigade. It continued in its coastal defence mission of southwest Hwanghae Province at least until the end of August 1953. However, by January 1956, it had been relieved by 26th Brigade and was redeployed further south. It was then attached to I Corps, Second Army Group, and was responsible for coastal defence from Yesong River to Haeju. Its headquarters was located near Haeju and its commander during this period was Senior Colonel Choe Hyck (1956).

24th Brigade

The 24th (249th) Brigade was formed at Wonsan in August 1950, simultaneously with the formation of 23rd Brigade at Chinnamp'o. At this time elements of units subordinate to the 599th Unit at Wonsan, including the 945th Regiment (which had participated in the KPA amphibious landings on the east coast), were integrated into this newly constituted unit.

The mission of the brigade was to defend the Wonsan area. However, the brigade was quickly dispersed upon the arrival of elements of I ROK Corps in the area in early October 1950. The brigade then withdrew northward, with elements scattered in two directions. Some elements withdrew due north from Hamhung towards Kanggye while the remainder withdrew to the north-east up the coast towards Nanam and also to Hyesanjin. However, following the evacuation of UNC units from northeastern Korea, the brigade was able to consolidate its forces with other stragglers and remnants and was redesignated as the 24th Division under IV Corps. It then moved towards the Hungnam Perimeter. Following the UNC evacuation of the Hungnam area, the division proceeded to the Wonsan area where it again took up coastal defence positions. In February 1951 the division was placed under VII Corps which had then arrived in the area.

During 1951 the 24th Division, under the command of Major General Chae Mun Chol, remained in the Wonsan area. Here it was deployed from the vicinity of Kojo north to the Hodo Peninsula and, while receiving additional equipment and personnel, prepared defences against possible UNC amphibious landings. In June 1951 the 24th Division added a tank battalion from the 105th

Tank Division to its three infantry regiments. Then in October 1951, the 24th Division was again reorganised as a brigade and redesignated the 24th Mechanised Artillery Brigade. However, it remained a coastal defence unit with the only mechanised unit of the brigade being a tank battalion. By mid-1952 the basic organisation of the brigade consisted of six motorised artillery battalions and two battalions of infantry.

During January 1956 the brigade, under the command of Senior Colonel Kim Song Kuk, continued to defend the coast in the Wonsan area, from Songjon-ni to Kowon, with its headquarters at Wonsan. However, it was then attached to II Corps, Third Army Group, which had replaced VII Corps.

It is one of the forebears of the present-day combined-arms brigades.

25th Brigade

The origins of this brigade are obscure since there are no reports emanating directly from the unit. However, a 25th Coastal Defence Brigade was activated at Chinnamp'o in July 1950 and was subsequently deployed in the Chorwon area during August and September 1950. The brigade was initially committed in the Seoul area during September but was forced to withdraw before the UNC advance. The brigade was last in contact with UNC forces in October 1950 in the northeast sector. The brigade was previously believed to have been disbanded but in 1952 reliable reports placed the brigade in the area formerly occupied by the 63rd (507th) Brigade from the Hodo Peninsula, on the east coast, north to the vicinity of Hungnam. It was reorganised as a mechanised artillery brigade in October 1951, similarly to the 24th and 26th Mechanised Artillery Brigades. In August 1953, attached to V Corps and under the command of Kim Yo Man, the brigade was deployed for coastal defence, south of Hungnam, in the area around Yonp'o.

From January 1956 the brigade, under the command of Major General Chang Pom, continued to defend the coast in the Hamhung area. However, it was then attached to II Corps, Third Army Group which had replaced VII Corps and was responsible for the extremely long coastline from Kown to Songjin.

766th Independent Unit³

The 766th Independent Unit is believed to have been formed in July 1949 at Wonsan, its personnel being obtained by reorganising an entire infantry OCS (officer candidate school) class from the school at Hoeryong, including instructors, cadres and students.⁴ The unit was originally organised into three battalions; by the time of the war it had been expanded into six battalions with a personnel strength of approximately 1,500.⁵

On 24 June 1950 the 766th was divided into three forces under direct control of GHQ. One force would cross the 38th parallel, leading the 5th Infantry Division's attack south along the east coast while the remaining two forces embarked at Yangyang for amphibious landings at Pusan, Kangnung and Samch'ok the following morning. The landings at Kangnung and Samch'ok were conducted by company-sized units, of 80 men each, using large numbers of sampans and coastal craft. Whereas the unit that was to be landed northeast

of Pusan was a reinforced battalion-sized force of 600 men and was embarked upon a 1,000-ton steamer.

On “ . . the evening of the 25th there took place the most important surface engagement of the war. Northeast of Pusan PC 701. Commander Nam Choi Yong ROKN, encountered a 1,000-ton armed steamer with some 600 troops embarked, and sank it after a running fight. Since Pusan, the only major port of entry available for the movement of supplies and reinforcements to South Korea, was at this time almost defenceless, the drowning of the 600 was an event of profound importance.⁶

Those elements of the 766th that were landed amphibiously at Kangnung and Samch'ok had the task of establishing beachheads along the east coast in the rear of the ROK army in order to disrupt rear-area communications and defences. When their mission had been accomplished and contact had been established with the other elements of the unit, the unit was to infiltrate through the mountains in the direction of Pusan to join the battalion landed there.

The 766th and the 5th Division entered Chumunjin without incident shortly before noon on 25 June 1950. Continuing the drive south, both units entered Kangnung on 26 June 1950 after an all-night battle. With the 766th still leading the attack, both units continued south until they reached the approaches to Samch'ok. Here the 766th was joined by elements which had made an amphibious landing near the town. It then proceeded into the hills, from where the troops, after changing into civilian clothes, infiltrated into Samch'ok in order to gather intelligence. The division entered Samch'ok on or about 5 July 1950. On 9 July 1950, after a large-scale engagement which involved the 766th only, the division and the 766th occupied Ulchin.

The 766th Unit, after undergoing a reorganisation at Ulchin, infiltrated small units westward into the mountains with the task of cutting communications between Pusan, Taegu and P'ohang-dang. It continued to operate as the spearhead for the 5th and later the 12th Infantry Division in the P'ohang-dang area for two months of intensive and costly fighting. During 17-19 August 1950 both the 12th and the 766th, after having suffered serious losses, were reorganised. During this reorganisation the 766th lost its identity and was absorbed by the 12th.

945th Independent Marine Regiment

The 945th Independent Marine Regiment is believed to have been activated in July 1949 at Wonsan and attached to the new navy headquarters. Along with the 766th Independent Unit, the 945th was responsible for the amphibious landings along the ROK's east coast at the beginning of the war. Although most sources indicate that the 945th landed in the wrong sector and proved ineffective, this may be incorrect. The 945th may in fact have been the unit assigned to the Pusan landing and sunk en route to its landing site (see 766th Independent Unit above). If this is correct, then the 945th proved “ineffective” only because it was destroyed. The unit was deactivated the following month, August 1950, and its personnel incorporated into the 24th (249th) Brigade (see above).

Notes

1 History of the North Korean Army, pp. 80-83 and Order-of-Battle Handbook: Chinese Communist Forces, Korea and The North Korean Army, pp. 27-28, 32-33, 39-40, 52-57, 61, 64-69.

2 Field Jr., pp. 423-426 & 432.

3 This unit is also known as the 766th Infantry Regiment, and Independent Infantry Regiment. There is confusion about the exact operations of the 766th during the initial invasion, stemming from the fact that other units were also involved in amphibious operations at the same time and in the same areas, most notably the 945th Independent Marine Regiment and the 5th Infantry Division's guerrilla group (which consisted of two battalions of 600 men each).

4 US Army, FEC, ATIS Research Supplement No 3, 15 November 1950, pp. 18-20.

5 "Enemy Tactics", p. 120.

6 Field, p. 51.

Appendix C

The DMZ tunnels

“Until all [tunnels] are located and neutralised, North Korean tunnels represent a potentially significant military threat to the South.” — DIA¹

The Demilitarised Zone²

The majority of the missions assigned to the Special Purpose Forces initially require a covert means of insertion into the ROK. The primary obstacle to such infiltration is the DMZ.

At the time of Japan's unconditional surrender on 14 August 1945, elements of the Soviet XXV Army had occupied most of the northern Korean Peninsula and were steadily expanding their zone of control southward. This expansion was halted approximately one month later with the arrival of US forces in the south. In accordance with a previous agreement the peninsula was divided at the 38th parallel into Soviet and US Zones. The 38th parallel provided a convenient line delineating areas of responsibility for the processing of Japanese prisoners-of-war and assets. From 1945 to 1950, the 38th parallel increasingly became a political barrier between the Communist Bloc and the Western world. The Fatherland Liberation War altered and reinforced this demarcation and it still stands today.

As a result of the P'anmunjom Armistice Agreement of 27 July 1953, a demilitarised zone of two kilometres on either side of the military demarcation line (MDL) was established. The armistice suspended active hostilities, provided for the withdrawal of military forces and equipment from the DMZ and prevented both sides from entering air, ground or sea areas controlled by the other. Following no specific natural or cultural barrier this 243km-long and 4km-wide DMZ follows a sinuous path across rivers, plains and mountain ranges; in only a few places does it follow any natural boundary. The western terminus is 42km northwest of Seoul. Beyond the western end, a neutral zone represented by the Han River estuary extends westward into the Yellow Sea. The eastern terminus is 29km north of Kamsong.

The primary environmental factor in the DMZ is its formidable terrain which, with the exception of the major land routes, consists of hills or mountains with slopes that restrict or canalise vehicular movement. While this type of terrain is favourable for static defence, it almost defies effective defence against unconventional forces. The remote and inaccessible mountain regions have provided havens for KPA infiltrators, providing cover and concealment, safe areas and numerous routes for evasion and escape.

Vegetation in the DMZ consists primarily of brush and scrub. In the hills and mountains this vegetation provides concealment for small units. The lowlands and principal corridors consist primarily of open fields, many of which have reverted to tall grasses, weeds and thickets. There is no agriculture within or

adjacent to the DMZ except for a small number of local farmers who have been permitted to cultivate a limited amount of land on the fringes of the DMZ for political reasons.

Military operations throughout the Korean Peninsula are greatly influenced by hot wet summers and cold dry winters. Most precipitation occurs between June and September with the heaviest rains, in July and August, turning fields and many roads to quagmires and streams to impassable torrents. Summer is also the season of high temperature (32°C (90°F) or more) and humidity, with fog, low clouds, and poor visibility. Winter, on the other hand, provides optimum conditions for large-scale ground operations; fields, paddies and streams are frozen, skies are generally clear and precipitation light and trees are stripped of foliage. This is also the period of extremely low temperatures and strong winds from Manchuria. A surface temperature of -18°C (0°F) and a wind speed of about 32km/h (20mph) produces a wind-chill equivalent of -39°C (-39°F), a condition not unusual along the DMZ.

Following the Fatherland Liberation War, the KPA changed its tactics from overt military aggression to covert subversion largely accomplished by the infiltration of unconventional warfare forces across the DMZ. The DMZ remained the preferred infiltration route south until the late 1960s when the ROK, lacking adequate manpower to police such a long and hostile border, constructed an integrated barrier system along the southern boundary. A 3m (10 ft)-high barrier fence, anchored in concrete and topped by concertina wire was completed and supplemented with minefields, anti-tank ditches and electronic sensing devices. Reinforced watch towers, concrete bunkers and guard posts were established overlooking the most frequented infiltration routes. Large areas of brush were, and are today, cleared along roads, fences and around military positions within and adjacent to the southern boundary of the DMZ.

During the early 1970s the KPA initiated an extensive programme to upgrade and expand its armoured and motorised forces. In response to this expanded threat the ROK initiated a modernisation of its DMZ barrier system. Included within this modernisation was the digging of an anti-tank ditch along the length of the DMZ and the construction of an in-depth defensive zone behind the DMZ with concrete-reinforced positions throughout. All roads and bridges within the defensive zone were prepared for demolition and more. This barrier system was not intended as the sole defence against infiltration into the ROK, or even through the DMZ. However, its effectiveness has resulted in the KPA being forced to alter its strategy to infiltration by air, sea and tunnel. Although more expensive, these methods offer more security. In bypassing the DMZ, SPF personnel are able to choose landing sites in remote and unprotected places within the ROK rear areas.

The DMZ tunnels³

Probably one of the most unusual aspects of the KPA attempts to infiltrate the ROK has been its efforts to tunnel under the DMZ. These operations began during the early 1960s but did not move into high gear until the late 1960s with the ROK fortification of the DMZ.⁴ The engineer battalion of each infantry division deployed directly along the DMZ was tasked with digging two



South Korean troops clear rubble used by the KPA to backfill an infiltration tunnel.

infiltration tunnels with technical and logistic assistance being provided by the Corps Engineer Department and General Staff Department's Engineer and Rear Services Bureau. The KPA has normally deployed 11 infantry divisions along the DMZ: I Corps (forward)—four, V Corps (forward)—three, II Corps (forward)—three and IV Corps—one. Based on the estimate that each of these divisions is responsible for two infiltration tunnels there are theoretically 22 tunnels. Apart from the three tunnels already located and neutralised the DIA currently estimates that there are 18 active tunnels in various stages of completion along the DMZ. The three known tunnels are located as follows: Tunnel No. 1—II Corps (forward) 8th Infantry Division sector, Tunnel No. 2—V Corps (forward) 12th Infantry Division sector and Tunnel No. 3—II Corps (forward) 6th Infantry Division sector.

The first evidence of KPA tunnelling operations emerged in November 1973 when ROKA DMZ guards reported numerous explosions that started north of the DMZ and gradually drew closer. Aerial and ground reconnaissance failed to provide any reasonable explanation for these explosions but road improvements and the construction of fortifications were noted along the northern edge of the DMZ. To keep track of these explosions seismic equipment was deployed along the DMZ. This equipment soon yielded voluminous information, recording 16,685 explosions on 877 different occasions in the Ch'orwon area alone. Similar numbers were also recorded in the areas of the major north-south routes along the length of the DMZ, the majority being located towards the west, along the routes that lead to Seoul.

In November 1974, a KPA engineer defected and revealed that the KPA was tunnelling under the DMZ. More importantly he provided information on the locations of two tunnels, one in the Korangp'o area and one in the Ch'orwon area. Acting on this information, on 15 November, a ROKA patrol found steam rising from the ground in the DMZ near Korangp'o. Five days later, a combined ROKA/UN team located what turned out to be a small tunnel. This tunnel, approximately 45 metres (148 feet) below the surface, was lined with concrete slabs for roofing and walls and had a small railway along its floor for the removal of spoil. The tunnel had a total length of approximately 2,000 metres (1,000 metres south of the MDL) and measured 1.2 metres high by 1.1 metres wide. Although small, this tunnel would have enabled considerable numbers of

light infantry and reconnaissance personnel to pass undetected behind the forward ROK/US positions.⁵

Various methods were employed to locate the tunnel in the Ch'orwon area including seismic, photographic, sonic and others but with little success. Finally, a series of exploratory bore holes were drilled on what seemed a likely intercept line in a valley (thus ensuring only a minimum amount of drilling would be required and providing cover from KPA observation). Approximately 55 bore holes were drilled, of which seven proved to be suspicious as either they passed through cavities or the rock samples contained sand, grass and other materials (none of which is a geological feature of granite). In each case, a specially designed camera confirmed the existence of a cavity. Additionally, thousands of gallons of water pumped into the bore holes drained away quickly. It was the KPA who provided conclusive evidence that these bore holes had entered a tunnel. KPA engineers placed a cement block under one of the shafts; cement had never before been found in 58 metres of granite!

The discovery of the Ch'orwon tunnel was announced on 19 March 1975 and the counter-tunnel was completed on 24 March. The Ch'orwon tunnel was approximately 50-150 metres (160-500 feet) below the surface, had a total length of approximately 3,300 metres (1,100 metres south of the MDL) and measured 2 metres high by 2 metres wide. Although projections would not allow the passage of a jeep, smaller vehicles and heavy weapons could have passed through it as well as an estimated 8,000 troops an hour. The tunnel was painstakingly cleared of three major blocks, all of which had been booby-trapped. This clearing operation revealed two chambers used to house electric generators and machinery for pumping air and water.

Continued surveillance efforts paid off in mid-1978 when the ROKA located another tunnel. This time only 4km south of P'anmunjom. On 10 June 1978 the ROKA began digging an interception tunnel and on 17 October 1978 they broke through into the third KPA infiltration tunnel. This tunnel averaged 73 metres (240 feet) below the surface, had a total length of approximately 1,640 metres (435 metres south of the MDL) and measured 1.95 metres high by 2.1 metres wide.



Entrance to a South Korean counter-tunnel.

	Tunnel No. 1	Tunnel No. 2	Tunnel No. 3
Date of discovery	5 November 1974	19 March 1975	17 October 1978
Location	8km northeast of Korangp'o	13km north of Ch'orwon	4km south of P'anmunjom
Height of tunnel	1.2 metres	2 metres	1.95 metres
Width of tunnel	0.9 metres	2 metres	2.1 metres
Depth below surface	45 metres	50–160 metres	73 metres
Total length	3.5km	3.5 km	1.64km
Length south of MDL	1,000 metres	1,100 metres	435 metres
Tunnel lining	Concrete	None	None
Troop capacity	1 Regiment plus heavy equipment	8,000 combat troops	per hour.
Invasion route	Korangp'o— Uijongbu— Seoul (Total 65km)	Ch'orwon— P'och'on— Seoul (Total 101km)	Munsan— Seoul (Total 44km)

The road work and construction of fortifications which had been detected along the northern edge of the DMZ were apparently a part of a KPA deception plan to ensure that the huge quantities of spoil produced by these tunnels would not be spotted by ROK/US reconnaissance. Tunnel entrances were also located in "dead ground" to photography from south of the DMZ. In 1984 there were still 18 suspected tunnels in various stages of completion along the DMZ.⁶ These tunnels are believed to be the same size as the tunnel found near Ch'orwon. Surveillance of the suspected tunnel entrances, and possible exits, continues but their exact locations or the extent of construction remains unknown. Whether these tunnels will be counter-tunnelled if positively located is questionable due to the enormous costs involved.

Notes

1 "Why Korea is Scared", p. 4.

2 "North Korean Infiltration Raises Specter of Insurgency", pp. 4–6 and "Korean DMZ: The Challenge of Making it Work", pp. 12–14.

3 Harris, Major J.D. "Under The Land of Morning Calm", British Army of the Rhine, No. 54, December 1976, pp. 45–47; Reed, David. "North Korea's Secret Invasion Tunnels", Reader's Digest, March 1980, pp. 90–94; and Korean Information Service. "Tunnels of War: North Korea Catcombs the DMZ", Seoul, Korea, 1978, 17 pages.

4 Sometime during 1961–1962 the engineer battalion of 26th Infantry Division, then located in Yunan-gun, South Hwanghae Province, began construction on an infiltration tunnel by digging into the side of Yongkak Mountain. "Escape From the Jaws of Death (I)", p. 13.

5 It is quite possible that light infantry and reconnaissance personnel had used this tunnel for a considerable period of time before its discovery.

6 "North Korean Special Purpose Forces", p. 4.

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